माडर्न ओरियण्ट. लिटरेचर

MODERN ASSAMESE LITERATURE

By DIMBESWAR NEOG

FOREWORD

By DR. JULES BLOCH

After having published in his mother tongue several books and essays on Assamese literature, Mr. Dimbeswar Neog is now placing before a larger public the results of his many years of strenuous and disinterested labour. Before it was printed, as far as I am aware, no full description (of Assamese literature) was to hand to be compared with the numerous histories of Bengali literature or the recent exhaustive *History of Maithili Literature* due to Dr. Jayakanta Mishra. Now thanks to Mr. Dimbeswar Neog, all Indians will be acquainted with a new treasure of productions due to Indian mind, and not only Indians but friends of India everywhere, among which I being one, wish the present authoritative book the success which the devotion and energy of its author deserve.

JULES BLOCH

Paris, 21-4-51.

PREFACE

THE following pages represent the labour of the writer covering a period of more than thirty-three years. From sometime about 1922 I felt myself interested in collecting materials for a paper "A Peep into the History of Assamese Literature from the Earliest Times" that I was called upon to read in September, 1923, in the eighth annual sitting of the Assam Students' Conference held at Nowgong under the presidentship of the late C. F. Andrews.

2. In the following two years, 1924-26, as a post-graduate student of the English Department in the Cotton College, Gauhati, I even felt more encouraged in these researches, and found my path further illumined. I was also helped indirectly by the authorities of such institutions as the Assamese Students' Literary Club and Assamese Language Improving Society, both at Gauhati, where I had been asked to read two papers, one on "Assamese Literature before Śaṅkaradev", and the other on the "Composite Character of the Assamese Language", the former sometime in 1924, and the latter, in April, 1925.

3. The original paper, thus modified and improved from time to time, was then published in three instalments, in the first three issues of the quarterly literary journal, *Milan*, Vol. IV (1925-26). This met with congratulations from worthies in a measure beyond expectation and also with felicitations in the shape of an award of the Kriṣṇa Prasād Memorial Medal as the best contribution to the journal for the year.

4. The Modern Period was first taken up for separate treatment when the Candradhar Baruwā Government

Trust Board declared a prize for the best "Comprehensive and Representative Anthology of Modern Assamese Poetry from 1830 to 1930," in 1932. Among half a dozen competitors, the anthology of the present writer, since published as *Kāvyapratibhā* in 1935, was considered the best and was awarded the first prize of Rs. 250/-. This book has since been prescribed as a text book for the Final Examination of the Senior Madrssa of the Dacca University and for the Normal Final Examination, as also for B.A. Honours Degree of the Gauhati University.

5. The next effort in this direction was made when the same Trust Board declared in 1935 the next prize of Rs. 250/- for "An Exhaustive History of the Assamese Literature of the Modern Period (1830-1930) dealing with the living authors also and including a History of the Assamese Newspapers and Periodicals produced and published during the Period." This writer happened to be the recipient of this prize too. The work has since been published in 1937 as *Ādhunik Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranji*, and has been a text-book for the Calcutta University M. A. Examination on Modern Indian Vernaculars, as also in the Gauhati University.

6. The third endeavour was also connected with the declaration in 1938 of another prize by the same Board for the best "Comprehensive Anthology of Modern Assamese Prose from 1830-1940." There was keen competition and the prize of Rs. 250/- was finally announced in favour of this writer.

7. Single essays on the Modern Period were attempted in the articles entitled "The Modern Period of Assamese Literature" and "Whither Modern Assamese Literature" published respectively in the Assamese literary journals, *Jenti* (Vol. VII, no. 4, 1933-34), and *Bānhī* (Vol. XXII, nos. 5, 6 & 7). The second essay was prepared as a paper to be read in a special meeting convened by the Assam

Sāhitya Sabhā in May, 1933, practically surveying the whole range of modern Assamese literature and attempting a critical estimate of it.

8. Separate treatments of other special periods of Assamese literature were also attempted earlier. This writer is responsible for the first discourse on Assamese amorous folk-songs in the journal *Cetanā* (1921-22), followed by the first collection of such songs, *Ākul Pathik* (The Passionate Pilgrim) edited and issued in 1922 by this writer, and since publishing its sixth edition, the number now swelling into more than a thousand selected songs, with its companion volumes *Fāguni* and *Bihuwā*. Another discourse on Assamese pastoral love-songs appeared in *Bānhī* (Vol. XV, no. 9).

9. Assamese women's devotional folk-songs, such as Āi Nām, were also first discussed in an article by this writer in *Cetanā* (1922-23). In the same journal was also first discussed men's devotional oral songs, known as Dihā Nām, in 1923-24. These were followed by *Bhogjarā*, a collection of these devotional folk-songs of men and women, and also of Assamese Nursery Rhymes, edited and issued with introductions etc. in 1928. An elaborate discussion on Assamese Nursery Rhymes by this writer since appeared in *Banhī* (Vol. XVIII, no. 12), and a separate collection of Assamese Nursery Rhymes, *Putalī*, has been edited and published by this writer in 1943.

10. An exhaustive discourse on Assamese Women's Marriage Songs by this writer appeared in a long article in *Bānhī* (Vol. XXII, no. 9) sometime about 1923, and a comprehensive collection of the best of such songs nearing one thousand, entitled *Nāmati*, ramains a manuscript since 1923.

11. Early in 1924, a comprehensive collection, *Rab-Rabi*, of Assamese proverbs, carefully selected from the aphorisms of Ḍāka, with which they were hopelessly

confused in earlier collections, was made by this writer; and an elaborate discussion on the linguistic and metrical characteristics of the proverbs was issued in *Bānhī* (Vol. XV, no. 3). When a prize on the best collection of these proverbs was declared by the Assam Literary Conference sometime about 1936, this collection of about 2000 proverbs was submitted and won the said Rai Bahadur Ānanda Candra Āgarwālā, prize about December, 1937.

12. An independent treatment of the characteristics of Assamese ballad poetry in general, and of the *Janā Gābharur Gīt* in particular, was made in the Introduction to a collection of the latter, sometime in 1924-25. The first attempt to ascertain the date of Maṇikonwar and Phulkoṇwarar Gīt was made in my *History of Modern Assamese Literature* in 1937. More discussions in regard to the time of this prehistoric king of ancient Assam, Śankalādib, the father of Maṇikonwar and the grandfather of Phulkonwar, was carried on by this writer in *Āwāhan* (Vol. X, nos. 1 & 2, Puh & Magh, 1860 Śak.), and also in the *Kāmrup Research Journal* (Vol. VII, no. 1, April, 1939).

13. Essays on Assamese philology, as Origin of Assamese Language, were also published by this writer while still a student of the Post-Graduate English class during 1924-26. Such articles were : one on Assamese as a descendant of the Indo-European family of languages, (*Milan*, Vol. III, no. 3), another showing the relations of Sanskrit, Prakṛt and Āssamese (*Bānhī*, Vol. XVIII, no. 3). Other articles showing the Assamese and Bengali relations appeared in the *Bānhī* (Vol. XVIII, nos. 3 & 10), and another showing the Maithili-Assamese affinities was issued in *Bānhī* (Vol. XVIII; no. 11). Relation of Assamese with Prakṛt and other languages was also shown in different articles and editorial notes by this writer in the *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* and in particular in an article in its Vol. VIII (no. 3, pp. 97-100).

14. Pre-Vaisṇavite literature as the aphorisms o Ḍāka was thoroughly reviewed in such articles as the one published in *Milan* (Vol. III, no. 3). Such subjects were also discussed in such reviews as of "Kavindra Mahābhārata" (*Bānhī*, Vol. XX, nos. 8 & 9), "Asamiya Bhāṣār Maulik Vicār" (*Bānhī*, Vol. XXII, no. 2) and "Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranji (*Bānhī*, Vol. XXII, no. 4).

15. Vaiṣṇavite life and poetry were discussed by this writer in a large number of essays since 1921, as in the following :—Śaṅkaradew (*Cetanā*, 192/-22); Mādhawdew (*Cetana*, 1922-23); *Kīrttan*-Rāsa-Krīḍā (*Cetanā*, 1920-21); *Kirttan*-Vaikuntha Prayāṇ (Cetanā, 1922-23). Vaiṣnavite dramas as *Cordharā Nāt* and *Piparā Gucuwa Nāt* were reviewed in *Bānh*ī (Vol. XV, no. 6), and in Introductions written by this writer in the dramatic works *Janmayātrā* (1938) and *Nandotsava* (1940). Two articles were also written on the humour of Vaiṣṇava writers by analysing two small epics, *Kāṇkhowā* (*Bānh*ī, Vol. XX, no. 12) and *Bhīm Carit* (*Bānhī*, Vol. XXI, no. 1)

16. Besides the reviews of *Kavindra Mahābhārata*, or *Parāgali Mahābhārata* as Bengali historians style it, this writer has thoroughly discussed in his articles other works in dispute between Bengali and Assamese, such as the Buddhist songs, *Kṛṣṇa Kīrttan*, and *Gopi-Candrar Gān*. The articles on such subjects are the two on *Kṛṣṇa-Kirttan* in the *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* (Vol. VIII, no 1, pp. 29-33) and one in the *Journal of the Assam Research Society* (Vol. VIII, no 1; January, 1941); and two others on the songs of Gopi Candra and their language in the *J A. R. S.* (Vol. VIII, nos. 3 & 4). The writer has also shown the traces of old Assamese in many present Bengal districts mainly from Grierson in an article in *A. S. S. Patrika* (Vol. XI, no. 1).

17. I also reviewed almost all new publications in connexion with my editing of about half a dozen journals

such as *Janmabhūmi* (1922-23), *Milan* (1923-26), *Bānhī*; (1923-30), *Jeuti* (1934-46) and *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* (1934-44). A few of the representative appreciations, reviews or criticisms of different branches are on the following modern works of leading authors :—*Tumi* (*Cetanā*, 1921-22); *Pratimā* (*Bānhī*, 1921-22); *Cintānal* (*Bānhī*, Vol. VI no. 7); *Kadam Keli* (*Milan*, Vol. VI no. 1); *Caku-Lo* (*Bānhī*, Vol. XI); *Rangili* (*Milan* Vol. II, no. 4); *Mulā Gābharu* (*Milan* III, no. 3); *Sāhitya Vicār* (*Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* Vol. II, no. 1); *Galpāñjali* (*Jeuti* Vol. XII, no. 3). I have also dealt with the merits of different works in such articles as the Assamese Text-books of the University (*Bānhī*, Vol. XXI. nos. 2 & 4) ; The Assamese Textbooks for Secondary Schools (*Bānhī*, Vol. XXI, nos. 9 & 11): University Text-books in Assamese (*Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā*, 1937-38); The Assamese Drama and the Stage (*Bānhī*, Vol. XX, no. 2)

18. The foot-notes in the present work will clearly indicate all the available sources from which my information is taken and the extent to which I have availed myself of the works of others. It will also appear side by side that while reviewing almost every known opinion on important issues in detail, I have always given my own judgment and have expressed my frank opinion. On most of the important dates not only have I examined all the known arguments, for and against, in supporting or rejecting them, but have often dated many important events so long undated or ascertained from wrong data, now shown by me to be mistakes of facts, after careful scrutiny.

19. I have determined the jurisdiction of the old Kāmarupa or East India speech, in my *Introduction to Assam*.* In the first part of my *History of Assamese Literature* I have shown from various sources suggesting, but never so definitely saying, that many poets of Buddhist songs really hailed from Kāmarupa. This was thought to be too presumptuous when I first wrote that the Buddhist poets who

*Published by Messrs. Vora & Co., Bombay, 1947.

were considered by Mahamahopadhyaya Śāstrī to be Bengali, were really old Kāmarūpī poets as their language often indicated. I was confirmed in my belief when later I happened to go through Mahapandit Rahul's *Purātattwa Nibandhāvalī*. About the period of composition of these Buddhist songs, I have now supported Mahapandit Rahul's view formed by a study of the Tibetan works and *Life of* 84 *Siddhas* rather than that of Dr. Chatterji, and on this account I have had to revise my earlier opinion and have dated this period as ranging from the seventh to the twelfth century. I have given copious illustrations in support of my view. I have criticised the Assamese scholars who placed a Gītī-Yuga (Period of Songs) in between the seventh and the ninth century, and have shown how this was impossible. But all the same, I have said that some songs and ballads probably had their origin before the twelfth century just on the eve when the modern Indian vernaculars came into being; but we hardly find them as they were since they have been orally transmitted to us through generations. I have also shown what contents of the songs could have been then issued. Thus I have shown both secular and religious literature in Assamese flourishing side by side in this period.

20. In the pre-Vaiṣṇavite Period too, I have clearly shown religious and secular literature in Assamese growing side by side, and have included, with analysis, many works earlier considered to be Bengali, as really belonging to the parent Kāmarūpī or East India Speech. I have summed up here all my arguments put forth of my earlier essays specially those on *Gopicandrar Gān*, *Kṛṣṇa Kīrttan* etc. I have also traced the history of early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, and have shown the hollowness of pushing the early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam too far. I have also tried to show that many of the so-called bonafide early Vaiṣṇavite works were probably revised in the Vaiṣṇavite period.

I have said this particularly from the colophons of Mādhava Kandalī's *Rāmāyaṇa* which work is definitely proved to have been supplemented and revised by Śankaradeva and Mādhava deva. I have also exhaustively dealt with all the earlier opinions in regard to the dates of the two most prominent pre-Vaiṣṇavite poets, Hem Sarasvatī and Mādhava-Kandalī and have ascertained them afresh. On the religious and social condition of Assam before Śankaradeva, I have not only discussed the earlier views, but have also quoted from the earlier biographies and particularly from the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. I have also discussed threadbare and quoted amply to prove that such works as *Dipikācandra*, earlier placed in the pre-Vaiṣṇavite period and pushed beyond eleventh and even to sixth century, must have certainly been a pro-Vaiṣṇavite work but not earlier than the seventeenth century.

21. I have similarly divided the literature of the Vaiṣṇavite period into religious and secular and have similarly tried to give a distinct outline of all known authors, their time and works etc. For example, I have clearly discussed all the varied opinions in regard to Śankaradeva's date of birth and the duration of his life, and I have not only shown the hollowness of the opinions I have found untrue, but have also replaced them with my opinion supported by extracts from old records, the authenticity of which I have tried to bring home to my readers. I have also tried to trace the renascence of the Vaiṣṇavite period from pre-Śankarite institutions such as Ojā-Pālī and have dealt exhaustively about all such pre-Vaiṣṇavite poets as Durgābar and also about the Sylheti dialect which shows far more distinct traces of Assamese than of Bengali. I have also endeavoured to explain the philosophy of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam and also to show, of course by quotations from the original Vaiṣṇavite biographies, how Śankaradeva's disciples were scattered over different parts of India. I

have also attempted to bring out the high literary excellence of the masterpieces in Assamese Vaiṣṇavite literature. Besides, I have tried to show here the rise of the Assamese drama, origin of the Assamese stage, development of the Assamese poetic diction, origin of Assamese prose etc. with illustrations. I have also attempted to point out the spurious works attributed to Śankaradeva and Mādhavadeva adducing proofs for my opinion.

22. In dealing with the post-Vaiṣṇavite Period I have tried to show the ebb of Vaiṣṇavism and of religious literature, and gradual rise of secular literature represented not only by the Āhom chronicles in Assamese but also by the prominence of pseudo-scientific works such as *Ghorā-Nidān* and *Hastividyārṇava* and mainly by the progress of popular ballads and folk-songs. Though the work probably belongs to the earlier period, I have discussed here the famous work earlier described as the *Parāgali Mahābhārat* by Kavīndra Paramesvara (?) composed in the dialect of Chittagong, but now discovered to be an old Assamese work by Kavīndra Patra, whom I have earlier and now styled as Assamese Sir Philip Sidney, a warrior-poet, famous in another old Assamese authentic work *Darrang Raj Vaṁśāvalī*. I have seen the manuscript of this work preserved in the Gauripur Raj family. I have also elaborately shown the varieties and beauties of Assamese ballads and folk-songs, the more so as my few humble publications on the subject happen to be pioneer works in that line carefully collected and edited in the light of scientific editions of such works in other literatures.

23. Last but not least, the Modern Period of Assamese literature was quite exhaustively treated by myself in my earlier work *Ādhunik Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranji* which may be considered as a work by itself. The different chapters into which it was divided were (1) Modern Assam and Modern Assamese Literature; (2) The Literary Efforts

of the American Baptist Mission Foreign Society, Assam; (3) The Real Pioneers of Modern Assamese Literature; (4) The Development of Modern Assamese Poetic Diction; (5) The Growth and Evolution of the Modern Assamese Prose Style; (6) The Progress of the Modern Assamese Drama; (7) Rise of the Assamese Novel and the Short Story; (8) The History of Assamese Newspapers and Periodicals; (9) Government patronage and Institutional Efforts; (10) Promises, Problems and Solutions. Each of these chapters was loaded with fresh information taken from sources not usually accessible and they were complete in themselves; and I have now made them up-to-date. Till 1936-37 when this original work was issued as the Candradhar Baruwā Trust Fund Prize Book, information in regard to the Modern Period was far from accurate and the few earlier essays that had been written were to be rectified by many important corrections made by me, specially in regard to the chapter on the work of the American Baptist Mission Forign Society in Assam. So I wrote in my Preface: "the writing of the history of literature of such a complex period is by no means an easy task, and the difficulty is further enhanced when a work has to light its own way with the small candle of records that are so few and far between and fast vanishing." This treatise was highly appreciated by scholars, Assamese and non-Assamese.

24. As already stated, the present work is the result of more than thirty-three years' effort, conducted independently and single-handed. I had not had the least help what-so-ever nor any practical encouragement in the matter till 1940, when I had a piece of singular good fortune to come in contact with two intellectual magnets, Dr. Beni Madhav Baruwa M. A., D. Lit. (London), D. Lit. (Honoris Causa, Ceylon) and Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji M. A., D. Lit. (London), Khaira Professor of Indian Linguistics and Phonetics, and Head of the Department of Comparative

Philology in the Calcutta University and now Chairman, West Bengal Legislative Council. I was then kindly advised by Dr. Chatterji to prepare an English rendering of my books on the *History of Assamese Literature*, and these kind words are first responsible for the book, which the following of pages form the modern part only.

The Beauty Cot,
Jorhat, Assam
January, 1955.

Dimbeswar Neog

MODERN ASSAMESE LITERATURE

(1826—1947)

INTRODUCTION

A. *Consolidation of the British Rule*

The Burmese invasions and misrule (1816-24) following the civil wars of the Māyāmarā rebellion (1769-94) and Danduwa Droh (1810) left Assam unnerved and the morale of the people shattered, which even the seventeen Muhammadan invasions (1206-1682) and earlier internal struggles had failed to effect. It is through sheer irony of fate that Assam came into the hands of the British by the Treaty of Yandabu which was concluded on February 24, 1826, between the East India Company and the Burmese encroachers of the British territories on Assam borders, though Assam certainly belonged to no party. Even then Purandar Siṅha was recognised as the king of Upper Assam early from 1832 to October, 1838, or till he was deposed and the administration of the country was taken up by the Company. Now the administration was run naturally in Assamese till all on a sudden in 1836, Bengali usurped the place at the instigation of the Bengali clerks who now came to Assam for their living. Under the provisions of Act XXIX of 1837, and Section 337 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the language of the soil should have been used in Judicial and Revenue proceedings; but it was neglected in the case of Assam. The Assamese public had not yet come to themselves to claim redress of these wrongs. Meanwhile Major General Jenkins, the then Commissioner of Assam, suggested to the Missionaries in Calcutta through C. E. Travelian, Secretary to the East India Government, that they might establish a Mission in the North-East-

F. 11

Frontier Province especially for the Shān and Khāmti tribes; and the Missionaries in Calcutta forwarded the suggestion to the American Baptist Mission Foreign Society (A. B. M. F.) in Burma and recommended also that a wider field for propagation of Christianity might be created by connecting Assam with Burma. It was then William IV who was the ruler of Great Britain. The A. B. M. F. Society accepted the suggestion and thought it so convenient to enter into China from the west and to enter into Tibet through Assam. According to the project, Browns and Cutters, with a printing press, left Calcutta on country-boats, as steam-engine was not yet in use in this part of the world, on November 20, 1835, and reached Sadiya on March 23, 1836, covering these 800 miles of journey up the Brahmaputra in four months and three days. Bronsons and Jacobs then left Boston in America for Assam on October 18, 1836, and they followed the track of Bronsons and Cutters from Calcutta on April 26, 1837. As ill-luck would have it, the two families suffered from various ailments on the way, resulting in the death of Jacob Thomas on the 7th of July and the others somehow reached Sadiya on July 15, 1838. They were joined by still others, who now came down to the valleys to preach among the people of plains, and it is in this connection that they saw the injustice done by English rulers to the Assamese language and the people. They tried to bring their sad mistake home to them, but in vain. So the philanthropic Missionaries founded the modern Assamese literature by bringing out a journal, a lexicon, a grammar, a history and all that was needed, and they were at last crowned with success, after 36 years when the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and Assam, by his Resolution dated the 19th of April, 1873, ordered Assamese to be re-instated in the courts and schools of Assam. But the evil effects of a foreign tongue in the retarded progress of education

and growth of Assamese language and literature are unfortunately still felt.

B. *Lost self-Confidence*

The political conditions of Assam preceding the British rule left her almost in her grave. She was still beside herself when the East India Company took over her administration as though in a joke, which even seeing she saw not. Her eyes were wide open when these self-imposed rulers let the Bengali language usurp the place of Assamese in her schools and courts, and yet she failed to see it. Thus it was that Maniram Baruwa (1806-58) was one of the few early Assamese who were opposed to the British rule, and Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan (1829-59) one of the few Assamese who objected to the use of Bengali in Assamese schools and courts. So it appears that it took at least half a century for the Assamese people to awake from its mental torpor. Even today Assam has not quite come to her own. Politically she is even today a fraction of what she had indeed been. It is a tragedy that such districts as Dinajpur, Rungpur and Jalpaiguri, which linguistically and culturally in general, formed an organic whole with the rest of Assam, should have been cut piece-meal in the territorial redistribution under the British rule. It is still more a pity that Assam should have been deprived of Koc-behar, the thrice-sacred Jerusalem of Assam, hallowed with the holy graves of as many as three great Assamese saints Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, and Dāmodaradeva, and also of two great heroes of Assam—Nara Narayan and Cilārāi, and still embracing in its bosom such great Assamese Satras (monasteries) as Madhupur, Kākatkutā and Bhelādongā. With the narrowness of the Province had come the narrowness of the mind, which is the more pitiable. The Assamese are still a people of lost self-confidence, frightened at their own shadow. They cannot

believe in their own past achievements, cannot think of being associated with anything really great. It has taken them a number of years to overcome even the inferiority complex under "Benglo-phobia" after the usurpation of Bengali in Assamese schools and courts. The horrors of the Burmese invasions seem to haunt their minds still. They appear to have forgotten that they were the people, the only people in India, who out-witted the seemingly invincible Moghul army for all the time, resisting with patriotism and heroism as many as seventeen of their invasions, and winning unstinted praise even from the enemies. They appear also to have forgotten that Assam was perhaps the only instance of a Province baffling all imperialist attempts to devour her, keeping herself always at a safe distance even from the great Gupta and great Maurya empires of old. With the advent of independence Assam is, however, slowly gaining her, self-consciousness and is fast coming to her own.

C. *The Periods of Modern Assamese Literature*

The modern or British period of Assamese literature may roughly be divided into pre-Romantic (1826-89) and Romantic (1889-1947): and these again sub-divided first into non-Christian (1826-46), Christian (1846-73) and pre-Romantic (1873-83), and then into Romantic (1889-1909), post-Romantic (1909-29) and Realistic (1929-47) periods. In the small hours of the dawn of East India Company's rule in Assam, following the Treaty of Yandabu on February 24, 1826, and terminating in the publication of *Orunodoi*, the first Assamese journal published on January 15, 1846, we have a few writers of prose like Jādurām Baruwā (1801-69), the first Assamese lexicographer; Halirām Dhekiāl Phukan, father of Anandaram Dhekiāl Phukan, the first modern chronicler of Assam, albeit in Bengali; Māṇirām Baruwā (1806-58), the first Assamese revolutionary as a

martyr in the Indian Sepoy Mutiny, and the author of the manuscript called *Buranji Vivek Ratna* (1838), preserved in the library of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (D. H. A. S.); and Kaśīnāth Tāmuli Phukan, and Rādhānāth Barbaruwā, who translated one Ahom history into Assamese, since published in 1844. Meanwhile Mrs. Cutter published her *Assamese Words and Phrases*, a work of 251 pages, and before that Serampore Baptist Misssionaries got the *Bible* rendered into Assamese by one Ātmārām Sarmā of Kaliābar (Nowgāon, Assam), and published it in 1813. The Sanskrit Arithmetic of *Lilāvatī* rendered into Assamese verse by one Bakul Kāyastha, about the Vaiṣṇavite period was also published by Nathan Brown in 1845. The only work in verse written about 1833-46 is the *Belimārar Buranji* (History of Sunset in Assam) by one Biśveśvara Vaidyādhipa has since been published by the D. H. A. S. To the next period (1846-89) belongs the first Assamese journal *Orunodoi* (1846) followed by a host of other periodicals, the first *Notes on Assamese Grammar* (1848) by Nathan Brown, the first typical *Remarks on the Assamese Language* (1855) by Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan, the first *Bhāratbarṣar Dandavidhi Āin* (1865) by Nidhi Levi Farwell, and the first published Assamese lexicon (1867) by Miles Bronson, all pioneer works founding the modern Assamese literature, besides a large number of school books and Christian works in Assamese. Among non-Christian writers of this period, Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan (1829-59), the first Assamese advocate for reinstating Assamese, and Harakānta Śarmā Baruwā (1813-1900), the chronicler of a history of Assam after Kāśīnāth, are the leaders. Dutirām Hāzarikā (1806—1909), the reputed author of *Kali-Bhārat* (1862), another chronicler of Assam in verse, is the only poet worth mentioning. The third sub-period (1846-73) saw the pioneer stalwarts of modern Assamese literature like the Baruwas, Hemcandra and Guṇābhirām, in

prose, and Ramākānta Caudhurī and Bholānāth Dās in poetry introducing, English influence into Assamese literature in general, and short poems and blank verse into poetry in particular. The fourth sub-period (1889-1909) really saw the Romantic Movement of early 19th century of England introduced into Assamese literature particularly by such high priests as Candrakumār in poetry, Lakṣmīnāth in prose and Rajanīkānta in novel. There is a host of other names celebrated in modern Assamese prose and poetry alike as Kamalākānta, Lambodar, Satyanāth, Ratneśvara, Hemcandra, Benūdhar, Padmanāth, Durgāprasād, Ānandacandra, Mofizuddin, Hiteśvara, Sarat Candra, Durgeśvar, Raghunāth who have enriched the literature in its various branches. The fifth sub-period (1909-29) with such names as Jatīndranāth, Sūryakumār, Padmadhar, Ratnakānta, Ambikāgiri, Daṇḍināth, Dimbeśvar, Śailadhar, Mitradeva, Daibcandra, Binandacandra, Atulcandra, Kamaleśvar; and then the sixth sub-period (1929-47) with such names as Nalinībālā, Jyotiprasād, Nilamaṇi, Devakānta and their train are still thriving.

II

A. EARLY MODERN AND CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

(1826-89)

First Adventures of the A.B.M.F. Society.

It was when William IV was on the throne of England, and Andrew Jackson was the President of the United States of America that Major-General Jenkins, the then Commissioner of Assam, suggested to the Missionaries in Calcutta, through C. E. (later Sir Charles) Travelian, the then Secretary to the East India Company's Government, that they might as well establish a Mission in the North-East Frontier Province, especially for the Shān and Khāmti tribes. These Missionaries, in turn, recommended this suggestion to the American Baptist Mission Foreign Society in Burma with a further suggestion that it might be worth while to create a wider field for the propagation of Christianity by connecting Assam with Burma. The latter, of course, embraced this opportunity presently considering how convenient it would be to get into China from the west and to enter Tibet through Assam.[1]

Browns and Cutters at Sadiya, 23rd March, 1836.

This idea materialized when Rev. Nathan Brown and Rev. Oliver T. Cutter with their families and with a printing press left Calcutta for Assam on the 20th November, 1835. It was on country boats that they travelled to the far east along the mighty Brahmaputra, this long 800 miles against the current, to reach Sadiya on the 23rd March of the following year. They did not stop for a single day on their way save at Goalpara where they picked up a Shān teacher as pre-arranged by Major-General Jenkins. Thus landing at Sadiya they had not a moment to lose, and they

[1] N. P. Mason's *These Seventy-Five Years*, (1911); Benudhar Rajkhowa's *Sāhitya Prabeś* (1897); Assam Mission's *Nowgong Jubilee Publications*, 18th to 29th December, 1886.

started their propaganda and printing work at once among those hill-tribes. Within a month and a half, by the 7th of June 1836, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Cutter opened two schools for boys and girls respectively.[2]

Bronson on 7th July 1837, and martyrdom of Jacob Thomas.

It was an example that others were soon to follow. On October 18, 1836, Dr. Miles Bronson and Rev. Jacob Thomas with their families, set out for Assam from the far-off city of Boston in the New World. After reaching Calcutta, they started the same way for Sadiya as their predecessors, the Browns and Cutters, had done, on the 26th April, 1837. But they were unfortunate and were all taken ill even on board their Indian boats, and Dr. Bronson happened to be the worst victim. Sadiya, their destination, was yet ahead of a week's journey. Seeing his friend in a serious condition, Rev. Jacob Thomas took a smaller country-boat to try to get some medicine for his friend from somewhere in the neighbourhood. But, alas ! while thus rushing against the current, they saw a big tree on shore falling on the smaller boat and immediately consigning Rev. Jacob Thomas to the bottom of the Brahmaputra, then full to the brim. It was the 7th July of 1837; and the rest landed at Sadiya safely a week after, on the 15th July, and joined the Browns and Cutters.[3]

Khamti raid (Jan. 1838), migration to Jaypur, and Namchang, Barkers and martyrdom of Miss Bronson in 1840.

Dr. Bronson soon left for Jaypur near by and began propaganda-work among the Singphos. But early in January 1838, the furious Khamti people raised a rebellion, burnt houses and villages, and cruelly put the English officer of the place to death with their poisoned arrows. Rev. Mr. Brown and his family made a hair-breadth escape to join the Bronsons at Jaypur, the

---

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Cutters already leaving the place in quest of health. Dr. Bronson then made for the Nāgā Hills in 1840, leaving Rev. Mr. Brown and Rev. Mr. Cutter in charge of Jaypur area, and stayed at Nāmcāng to preach among the Nāgās. In this year, Rev. S. Barker, with his wife and Miss Roda Bronson, joined their predecessors at Jaypur, Miss Bronson now accompanying her brother to Nāmcāng. Here at last they were both laid up with illness and returned to Jaypur where Miss Bronson died towards the fag end of the year 1840.[4]

Nāgā risings (October, 1841) and Barkers Browns and Cutters at Sibsagar, Nowgang and Gauhati.

Experience, the best teacher, had taught these Missionaries meanwhile that they might really be much more successful if they began their preaching right among the Assamese population of the valley. Since 1841, they, therefore, began to expand the sphere of their activities throughout the length and breadth of Assam valley proper. In May of this year Mr. Barker left Jaypur, where he stayed for a year, for Sibsagar where he was joined by the Browns and Cutters soon after. There being another rebellion in Jaypur, and this time raised by the Nāgās, in October 1841, Dr. Bronson left for Nowgong where, subsequently, he settled permanently, and along with the work of preaching started an orphanage in 1843. Mr. Barker left Sibsagar the same year and staying at Tezpur for some time settled at last at Gauhati, and became the father of the Gauhati Mission. It is sad to say that this young man paid the debt of nature on the 31st January 1850, when his age was 42 years 10 months and 4 days, on board the ship which was bound for America. Dr. Bronson then went to Gauhati to take his place.[5]

---

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

The idea of following the Serampore Missionary's example.

The idea which prompted the Serampore Missionaries like Carey and others to take up the Bengali language as a vehicle for their work of preaching actuated also these American Missionaries to take to Assamese. Indeed, these eagle-eyed Missionaries rightly saw that no idea could ever be brought home to any people save through their mother-tongue. So even the Serampore Missionaries, after proceeding with their work in Bengali, also kept an eye on the Assamese to preach Christianity in Assam. With this aim in view the Serampore Missionaries as early as 1811, is known to have availed themselves of the services of one Ātmārām Śarmā of Kaliābar in Nowgong, and got the Old Testament of the Bible translated into Assamese by 1813 when it is said to have been first printed and published. The Gauhati Mission preserves only the second edition of this Serampore Bible in Assamese printed in 1833.

A knotty problem following the introduction of Bengali.

The American Missionaries had, however, found a knotty problem in following the royal road. The very year, 1836, in which they set their foot in Assam, Assamese, through an irony of fate, ceased to be the language of the courts and schools of Assam. It is a fact that when about this time the East India Company took the administration of Assam, a large number of Bengalis came to this province as clerks and they were totally ignorant of the language of the soil. They happened to catch a word or two of Sanskrit origin from the lips of the people and, failing to make any head or tail of the rest of their vocabulary, chose to call it at random a *patois* of Bengali and advised the rulers, who were then equally ignorant of the language, to replace it by the Bengali language.

The American Missionaries of philanthropic disposition

now naturally took up this cause and did their level best to bring home their folly to the authorities. But it was an uphill task at that. It is true that Assamese language had a very brilliant ancient literature. But were the books printed? Printing of Assamese books at that stage was out of the question. The people were just heaving a sigh of relief after a long period of internal struggles in the kingdom, though independent, and after the Māyāmarā rebellion, long and lingering, and the several savage invasions by the Burmese. Most of the manuscripts were lost or destroyed in these calamitous times, and what remained were scrupulously guarded mainly from an idea of religious sanctity, for they were mostly religious books : to allow them to be profaned being touched by anyone in any way was counted a sin, and to permit them to be printed was considered downright sacrilege. Then there were old manuscripts on history but they might not be deemed fit enough for recognizing Assamese and reinstating it. There was not one modern book, and it could not be till then, not a dictionary or a grammar of the language, not a magazine or newspaper, and not even an Assamese printing press.

Missionary philanthrophy and espousing the cause of Assamese.

So, the American Missionaries began in right earnest. They chose a line parallel to the Serampore Missionaries doing the spade-work for Bengali literature.

The first Bengali book by Carey or Rāmarāma Basu printed in 1801 is ahead of the first Assamese book of Ātmārām Śarmā, printed in 1813, by twelve years ; but it was not done in Assam, it was printed by the Serampore Missionary Press. This was not all. One of these Serampore Missionaries, Robinson, brought out one grammar of the Assamese language in 1839 and published a short history of Assam in 1841. It was after this, as we have seen before, that the American Missionaries began

American Missionaries and Assamese in the middle of the 19th century.

to settle in the plains in the midst of the Assamese population by retiring from among the surrounding hill-tribes. It was the Barkers and then the Browns and the Cutters, we said, who came to settle in Sibsagar, and it is due to their effort that the printing press was duly established there by 1844. It was in this year that they printed the first *History of Assam* compiled by Kāśināth Tāmuli Phukan and Rādhānath Barbaruwā, and published in January 1846, in the first Assamese journal, *Orunodai*, edited by Rev. O. T. Cutter.. It was a monthly paper, profusely illustrated by blocks, cut in wood by Assamese labour, from pictures of *The Illustrated London News*. It was a very useful and popular paper continuing till 1882. Rev. Nathan Brown published an *Assamese Grammar* in 1848 and Dr. Miles Bronson brought out the first *Assamese Dictionary* printed in 1867. Besides these, one history of the *Cutiyās* was printed in 1850 from an old manuscript in the *Orunodai* and Nidhi Levi Farwell's *Bhāratavarṣar Daṇḍavidhi -Āin* and Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan's *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language* appeared in 1865 and 1855 respectively.

Brown's challenge on behalf of Assamese.

Thus within nearly a quarter of a century, these philanthropic Missionaries from America were well equipped to restore the lost prestige of Assamese, and they pressed the authorities more than ever. Mr. Brown in the preface to his *Assamese Grammar* said that it was too hasty a conclusion, indeed, to say that Assamese was a *patois* of Bengali, too much mixed with the local dialects to be easily understood, and simply by finding so many words common to the two languages and failing to take into consideration this most important fact that such similarities are only natural both being derived from their common mother Sanskrit. He further argued that it was ridiculous to call Assamese an off-shoot of Bengali, since Assam never came in contact

with the Bengalis before the Muhammadan invasion of Assam, long before which Assamese was fully established. Pushing the matter further, he added that Assamese really far excelled Bengali in grace and softness.

Rev. Dr. Bronson also gave the same encouraging message in the preface to his *Assamese Dictionary*. He observed that Assam proved herself to be a living example of the fact that no misfortune, no battle, neither the rise nor the fall of a country, can take away the mother tongue from its people. The Āhoms, who spoke a dialect akin to the Khāmtis, ruled over Assam for six hundred years, but far from destroying the Assamese speech, they rather abandoned their own dialect in its favour. The Muhammadans and the Burmese by their repeated invasions failed to make the slightest change in this speech. And now the country was under the English who, far from encouraging the local language, were divorcing it from the schools and courts. It was only for the last thirty years that this unfortunate state of affairs prevailed; but all the same, Assamese has been current among the Assamese people as before, like the mighty Brahmaputra and shall remain so for ever. Such generous and unselfish efforts are never lost, and after a struggle, in which local patriots like Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan also joined, and which extended over a third of a century, the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, by his "Resolution", dated Calcutta the 19th April, 1873, reinstated Assamese in all the courts and schools of Assam, although in practice it took more than another quarter of a century to get rid of the menace completely.

Bronson's corroboration and final recognition of Assamese.

Rev. Nathan Brown (1807-86) saw the light of day on the 22nd June in a certain town of the United States of America. He graduated from Williams College as a youth of twenty summers. Then he served as a teacher and edited some

Rev. Nathan Brown's (1807-86) life-sketch.

periodicals in his own country. Later on, he was appointed a missionary and arrived at Moulmein in 1833. It was Mr. Brown who with Rev. Oliver Cutter started the first printing-press at Sadiya, Assam, in 1836. He became a scholar both in Khāmti and Assamese, established schools at Sadiyā and wrote text-books in the two languages and rendered the *Bible* into them. In September 1838, he lost his daughter, Miss Sophia Brown, in Assam; but the bereaved parents did not spare themselves the least from their task of writing, teaching and preaching. After their hairbreadth escape in the Khāmti rebellion, they established their press at Jaypur in May 1839, and undertook the work of printing in Shān, Singpho, Nāgā, Khāmti and Assamese speeches, both in Assamese and in Roman scripts. They then went to Sibsagar in 1843 and combined with Rev. Oliver T. Cutter to establish the press there whence they produced all the monumental works for the welfare of the Assamese literature, including *Orunodai*. In 1855, after a hard, but useful life of service of 20 years, Mr. Brown left Assam and passed the next 15 years in the United States of America. He now became the editor of *The American Baptist* and, in the political field, a prominent leader against slavery. In 1872 he left for Japan, settled at Yakohama and, mastering the Japanese language, brought out the first version of the *New Testament* in Japanese. On the 1st of January, 1886, he breathed his last.

Brown's contribution to Assamese literature.

Mr. Brown's contribution to Assamese literature is really unique. It is he who, amidst multifarious duties, first brought out a complete translation of the *New Testament* in Assamese in 1848, which saw as many as four reprints by 1873, the fourth being done after he had left Assam, and a fifth edition being brought out by the Baptist Mission in 1898 from Calcutta. Another work by him, styled "Khristar Vivaran Āru Subhavārtā," was published from Sibsagar in 1854.

Out of about 330 hymns rendered into Assamese, as many as 60 were done by Mr. Brown himself, and he wrote several other religious works besides. In a work entitled *The Whole Walford Kin*, he has very beautifully described his experience as a preacher in different lands and gives a vivid description of his beloved Assam among others. Mr. Brown's name is specially connected with another very important work of Assamese literature. It was he who first initiated in 1840 the move of collecting old Assamese manuscripts, and by 1850 he collected as many as twenty of such manuscripts. The *History of Assam* printed in 1844, the *History of the Cutiyās* published in 1850, and the *Old Assamese Arithmetic* by Vakula Kayāstha owe their publication and preservation solely to Mr. Brown.

Mrs. Eliza Brown's contribution.

Mrs. Eliza Brown, herself an authoress, was a true companion to Rev. Brown in all his works. Besides the death of their daughter, they had another misfortune in their blind son whom, in a serious condition, Eliza by herself had to take to Calcutta for treatment, and this was a journey from Jaypur of no less than four months down the current of the Brahmaputra on Indian boats of the old pattern. This she did to save her husband from undue interference in the discharge of his duties, on the 10th February, 1840; but even then she completed her work, *Gaṇanār Aṅka*, on this journey and got down at Gauhati to post the manuscripts to be printed in their own press at Jaypur for the use of their school pupils. Eliza Brown published in 1840 the first story-book for juveniles in Assamese.

Bronson's contribution.

Dr. Miles Bronson's (1812-83) monumental work is his *Anglo-Assamese Dictionary* containing about 14,000 pure Assamese words and their English equivalents, published in August, 1867, from Nowgong, as the first Assamese lexicon. It cost him immense labour and the result was that had to recoup

his lost health in America where he also lost his first wife in September 1869. He, however, returned this time with his daughter, Miss Maria Bronson, to Assam, in 1871, and ere long married the widow of Mr. Danforth. This lady too had a shattered health and in 1874 went with Miss Bronson to Burma where she died. Miss Maria, too on her journey back to Nowgong, died of an attack of cholera on board the ship not far from Golāpār. Dr. Bronson with a broken heart left Assam for good in 1878, when he said passionately: "I loth to depart. My heart shall stay here." Five years thence, he expired at Eton Rapid, Michigan.

Nidhi Levi Farwell and his contribution.

Nidhi Levi Farwell was the first Assamese to embrace Christianity, and the last of the trio mentioned above. The Browns and Cutters at Sadiya found this smart little boy, Nidhi, perhaps Nidhirām, among the batch of pupils recruited for their first school there. He, then a lad of fourteen, accompanied them to Jaypur perhaps as an apprentice for the job of a press compositor. On his expressing his willingness to be a Christian, Rev. Dr. Bronson baptized him at Jaypur on the 13th of June 1841, when he assumed his Christian name. Mrs. N. L. Farwell was converted by Mrs. Brown at Sibsagar in 1844. Nidhi, according to a popular version was originally a Hindu of a very low caste, hailing from a village called Sutar of the Kalangpur Mauza in the Subdivision of Tezpur. He was well-versed in writing both prose and verse. In an epistle he is said to have described his own dear village seen after a long time. Besides his *Bhāratīya Daṇḍavidhi-Āin* rendered into Assamese in 1865, he wrote history like *Hindusthānar Burañji*, storybooks like *Kani-Beheruār Sādhu* and poems like *Swaragar Vivaraṇ*, *Narakar Vivaraṇ* and so forth. In almost all that Brown, Bronson and others did, Nidhi always had a hand, and he may be called an all-pervading influence in the

Christian literature written in Assamese. *Orunodai* showed enough signs of Nidhi's influence.

Other Missionary writers like Cutter (the first editor of *Orunodai*), Ward and Garney deserve special mention.

Contributions of other Missionaries.

Mrs. S. R. Ward's Anglo-Assamese Vocabulary (1864), H. B. L. Cutter's Anglo-Assamese Phrases (1877) are useful works in the line. William Ward was a poet and translator of many Psalms. Garney was a Hebrew scholar and produced his rendering of the *Old Testament* in 1899. The bibliography of the American missionaries' own works is itself long, and yet it is supplemented by many works of non-missionary or non-christian writers published by these missionaries for the progress of Assamese literature. Kāśināth's *History of Assam* (1844), Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan's *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language* (1855) and Hemcandra Barua's *Asamiyā Bhāṣār Vyākaraṇ* are just a few to mention.

The works of the American Baptist Mission Foreign Society may be divided into two classes, secular and non-secular, or into three divisions, religious, literary and text-books, and the text-books may be further classified. Some of

Missionary publications of religious (Christian) interests.

the religious works are *Āmār Trān-Kartā Yisu-Khrīṣṭar Natun Niyam*, *Khriṣṭar Vivaraṇ āru Śubha Vārtā*, *Davidar Geet*, *Nistārar Upāy*, *Kathopakathan Prārthanā āru Dwitiya*, *Sṛṣṭi āru Pralay*, *Asamiyāloi Dharma-Sambhāṣaṇ*, *Pavitr Avatār*, *Musalmān Sakalalai Ciṭhi*, *Muktīr Bātā*, *Paṇḍit āru Dharmapracārak*, *Yātrikar-Yātrā*, *Tuti-Gān* (210), etc. The literary works other than those already mentioned include *Phūlmaṇi āru Karuṇā*, *Māk-Jiyek*, *Henry āru Teonr Lagna*, *Aparimitācārar Pariṇām*, *Josephar Kāhinī*, *America Āviṣkār*, *Varṇa-Vicār*, etc.

Law-books like N. L. Farwell's *Bhāratīy Daṇḍavidhi-Āin* and Ravicandra Deka Baruwa's *Asamar Daṇḍavidhi-*

Āin appeared and scientific subjects are treated in *Asamiyā Śikṣak*, a work published in 222 pages of the series *Asamiyā Larār Mitra* published in 1849. Geographical subjects are dealt with in *Bhūgol-Śikṣak*, a work of 177 pages included in the *Asamiyā Larār Mitra* and written with the help of Murray's *Encyclopaedia*, has also Mrs. Brown's *Geography Book I* printed in 1849 in the Samācār Candrikā Press and written in imitation of Peter Parley. There are lexicons like *Śabdāvalī āru Khanada-vakya* by Mrs. Cutter, consisting of 251 pages and printed in 1840, besides Jaduram Baruwa's *Benglo-Assamese Dictionary* (unpublished) presented to Colonel Jenkins in 1839, and Bronson's dictionary already referred to. There are schoolbooks on literature like *Bare-Matara*, *Prārthanā Kitāp*, *Padārtha-Vidyā*; works on Arithmetic like *Prathama Gaṇanā*, *Dvitiya Gaṇanā*, Vakul Kāyastha's first work on Arithmetic as also rendering of Sanskrit *Līlāvatī* published in two parts by Rev. Nathan Brown; juvenile story-books like *Suwani Sāj*, *Africār Konwar*, *Burhā Solo*, *Yuddha Nayaka*, *Rāmgatir Kābinī*, *Rebin Kāhini*, *Dhārmikchabā Bijanār Kāhini*, *Sarukālar Dharma*, *Māuri Choāli*, *Igalar Bāh*, etc. A large number of other works is already mentioned in other connections. Thus the American missionaries in Assam have left a golden heritage of Assamese literature which has really been the groundwork of modern Assamese literature.

Missionary publications of secular or educational subjects.

Rev. Miles Bronson in the learned Preface to his *Dictionary of Assamese* (1867) writes : "Assamese is the language usually spoken by the entire population of the Brahmaputra valley, and in most cases it is the only medium of intercourse with the bordering hill tribes. There is nothing to show that the Assamese race and their language have not existed in this Valley from time immemorial; and it is surprizing that during the change of rulers, the oppression and misrule to which they have been subjected, there are so few traces of any material change in their language.

"The Ahoms, a branch of the great Shān or Tāi race, conquered Assam at an early period, and governed it for many hundred years, until it passed into the hands of the present Government; but scarcely a trace of their language is found in the Assamese. The Burmese, Mohammadans, and powerful Cachari tribes have in turn waged war upon Assam without affecting the language. This may serve to show the love of a people for their own tongue."

A mischievous and spiteful attempt was then made by reactionaries to explode even this *Dictionary* as practically a Bengali lexicon marking as many as 591 out of the first 688 words of it as Bengali. This awful analysis with the *Dictionary* itself was then forwarded by the Government to the eminent Bengali scholar late Mr. R. C. Dutt, then Assistant Magistrate and Collector, 24 Pergunnahs, for eliciting his opinion, which he recorded as follows. This shows that the scholars and men of eminence were, as they must be, always above the "provincial patriotism and national conceit of the Bengalees living in Assam" as Sir P. C. Ray, another great Bengalee called it (Presidential Address, A. S. C., 1914). The educated young Assamese referred to by him might be no other than his friend Ānandarām Baruwā.

Great Bengalees no party to this malicious move.

"For the purpose of ascertaining the degree of resemblance between the Bengalee and Assamese languages.... In going over some 60 pages of the *Dictionary*.... the question I always put to myself was this, is the Assamese word, if written or pronounced by an Assamese, at once intelligible to a Bengalee? It will be observed that a very large proportion of words beginning with *a* is marked *as* Bengalee, while much smaller proportion of words beginning with ā, i, ī, and u are Bengali. The reason, I believe is this, it is a Sanskrit prefix very commonly used, having a negative sense (like *-un* in English) and there are also many other

Sanskrit prefixes *apa*, *ava*, *anu*, *adhi*, etc., all beginning with *a*.

"I have only to add that marking the words of a dictionary might indicate a greater resemblance between the two vernaculars than what actually exists, for in a dictionary every word finds place only once, and in conversation as well as in books, the short and I may say, familiar words, are more frequently used than the classical long-tailed words, and it is precisely in the short familiar words that Bengalee totally differs from Assamese, while the classical words coming from the common parent Sanskrit are generally to be found in both the languages. It will just be well to mention that, notwithstanding repeated endeavours, I have hardly been able to make out even the purport of the Assamese preface to this Dictionary. I have known an educated young Assamese for many years, and I could never understand him when he spoke Assamese, or quoted from Assamese poetry."[6]

Mrs. S. R. Ward in her *Glimpse of Assam* (1864) records exactly the same thing: "The languages (Assamese and Bengalee) are quite distinct. No better proof is needed than the fact that a Bengalee does not understand an Assamese and *vice versa*. (European) Officers who understand Bengalee very well, are quite at a loss when they hear Assamese pure and simple spoken by a villager."[7]

The Report on the Province of Assam (1854) by A. J. Moffatt Mills.

During the early monsoon of 1853, A. J. Moffatt Mills, Judge of the Suddar Dewani and Nijamat Adawlat, was deputed to Assam to enquire into the existing administrative condition of Assam who accordingly submitted his *Report on the Province of Assam*, in 1854, to Cecil Beadon, the then Secretary to the Government of Bengal. The *Report* records the following about education

[6] Memorandum by Mr. R. C. Dutt, preserved in the Assam Secretariat Records, reproduced with perimission.

[7] Ch. II, Climate and Language, Para VIII, p. 12.

etc. "A number of Bengalees came into Assam when we took the province, and from the uneducated state of the Assamese it was necessary to give them service; but there are now in Sibsagar and Gauhatty many young men of high family and good character who have qualified themselves for employ, and it is most discouraging to them to see most of the high and even some of the inferior offices filled by foreigners. When I was the Commissioner at Cuttack, the Government at my recommendation interdicted the employment of Bengalees, not domiciled in the country, without the special sanction of the Commissioner in Orissa, and I think the same order might with the greatest advantage be introduced into Assam."[8]

Government's "great mistake" in introducing a foreign language, viz., Bengali in Assam.

"That the schools have not done more good is attributable to the indifference of the higher classes to instruction, but more particularly to inefficient school-masters, the want of proper class-books and defective supervision; but there is, I think, good cause for the unpopularity of our schools. The people complain, and in my opinion with much reason, of the substitution of Bengalee for Vernacular Assamese. Bengalee is the language of the courts, not of their popular books and shāsters, and there is strong prejudice to its general use. It is because instruction is imparted to the youths in a foreign tongue that they look only to Government for employ. Assamese is described by Mr. Brown, the best scholar in the Province, as a beautiful, simple language, differing in more respects from, than agreeing with, Bengalee, and I think we made a great mistake in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengalee, and that the Assamese must acquire it. It is too late now to retrace our steps, but I would strongly recommend Anundaram Phookun's proposi-

[8] Para 91, p. 27.

tion to the favourable consideration of the Council of Education....An English youth is not taught Latin until he is well grounded in English, and in the same manner an Assamese should not be taught a foreign language until he knows his own."[9]

Education of Assam in a retrograde state under the British.

Mills in Appendix J to his *Report*, inserts " Observation on the Administration of the Province of Assam by Baboo Anundaram Dhekial Phookan". We quote below two extracts from it on education and court-language :—" We are constrained with regret to acknowledge that education in the country under the enlightened Government of England is in a retrograde state. During the prosperity of the Native Government the education of the respectable classes in Sanskrit knowledge always formed an object of the social care and attention of the State... Since the annexation of the province to the British Empire, Sanskrit education, owing to the want of encouragement, has gradually been abolished. A certain number of institutions styled Vernacular Schools, has been established in the country. Instructions in these Schools are imparted in a foreign language, viz. Bengalee, which is but imperfectly understood by the teachers themselves, not to speak of the pupils. The education which they afford is of the simplest and most elementary kind; the students seldom aspire to a higher knowledge than a mere acquaintance with simple reading and writing. The few books that are used in the branches of elementary learning are composed in a foreign tongue, which necessarily prevents their being of any popular use. Much time is, in the first instance, wasted in acquiring a knowledge of Bengalee, and the reason assigned for the substitution of the vernacular is that " Bengalee is the language adopted in the courts," as if the object were to make the Assamese a nation of Judicial officers.[10]

[9] Para 92, pp. 27, 28.

[10] Education and schools.

"Under the provisions of Act XXIX of 1837, the vernacular language of a District was directed to be used in the courts. We find, however, with regret, that notwithstanding the provisions of this wholesome law, a foreign language, viz. Bengalee, has been introduced into the Courts of Assam. It is only to the officers and other persons connected with the courts that Bengalee is generally intelligible. The mass of the population and even private gentlemen possess no knowledge of the language; ... For more than ten years after the annexation of the province, Assamese was the language of the courts. On what grounds Bengalee has been now allowed to supersede the Vernacular we are at a loss to understand. Assamese being the Vernacular language as well of the people as of the majority of the Judges and ministerial officers, of the courts, no inconvenience can possibly arise from its use."[11]

Even Act XXIX of 1837 demanding use of Assamese in courts was ignored.

In the following year, 1855, appeared from the Baptist Mission Press, Sibsagar, *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language* "by a Native", a work which is so often referred to by almost all subsequent writers on the subject. In his *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*, published from the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1897, Sir E. A. Gait I. C. S., observed: "For some years after the annexation of Assam Valley the old schools or tols for the teaching of Sanskrit were maintained. Subsequently these tols were replaced by modern Vernacular Schools, in which Bengalee, which had already been declared to be the language of the courts, was made the medium of instruction, the theory being that Assamese was only a dialect of the Bengalee and had no literature of its own.

A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language.

[11] Language of the Courts.

This view was eagerly refuted by the natives of the country and in 1855 a well-written vindication of the claims of Assamese to rank as a separate language was published under the title *A few Remarks on the Assamese Language* at the Baptist Mission Press, Sibsagar. The author is said to have been Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, a well-known Assamese scholar. The writer goes on to controvert the idea that Assamese has no literature and shows that prior to the beginning of the present century the Assamese literature was more extensive than Bengalee.

A Glimpse of Assam also has words about this and other works that preceded and followed it: "On this subject we need not add but refer any one specially interested, to a pamphlet by a Native entitled *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language*. In it the author gives a list of the ancient Assamese literature of 62 Hindu religious works and Purāṇs, and over 40 dramatic works, having for their subject historical events founded in the celebrated poems, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The Assamese cannot be said to be destitute of literature.[12]

" Assamee, not destitute of literature ".

"Many useful works have been issued by the American Baptist Mission Press since its establishment in 1837, prepared by the Missionaries. Rev. N. Brown translated the "New Testament" into Assamese, also "Pilgrim's Progress" and other useful books.[13]

"To aid in the study of the Vernacular, a Bengalee and Assamese Dictionary was prepared by Jaduram Deka Baruah in 1839 for Col. Jenkins and presented to the Mission. Brown's *Grammatical Notes* was issued in 1848, also *Vocabulary and Phrase Book* by Miss Cutter. In 1864 a small Vocabulary

Many publications of A.B.M.F.S.

---

[12] Para XI.

[13] Para. XII

in English and Assamese was compiled by Mr. Wood, the former work being out of print. In 1867, Dr. Brown compiled and issued an *Assamese and English dictionary*. Several useful works have been prepared by native gentlemen."[14]

"Orunodai"(1846-80) the first Assamese magazine.

"A monthly paper called "Orunodai" or Dawn of Light began its career of usefulness in 1846, and for many years was the only paper published in the province. It was most carefully edited, profusely illustrated, treating in all subjects, both secular and religious in a manner circulated to instruct and interest the people. The useful to sheet came to an end in December, 1880."[15]

Lieutenant Governor Sir George Campbell's Resolution.

"As the fruit of all these earnest efforts, Assamese now secured official recognition as a language of Law Courts and as the proper medium of instruction in the schools" in Sir George Campbell's time. Considering the importance of the subject we produce below the full text of the Resolution General Department; Education; Calcutta, the 19th April (1873); "Read again—Letter No. 3045, dated 17th May, to the Commissioner of Assam, asking for a report on the language used in the courts of Assam, and inquiring why Assamese should not be substituted for Bengalee as the language of courts and schools in Assam. Reply from the Commissioner, forwarding a collection of opinions from district and sub-divisional officers of Assam, and from other gentlemen whom the Commissioner consulted."

"*Resolution.* The Lieutenant-Governor observes that for many years there have seen differences of opinion on the question whether Assamese Language ought to be recognised as the court and the school language of 'Assam. Mr. Moffat Mills, after completing a tour through Assam and questioning carefully all the Government

[14] Para XIII.

[15] Para XV.

officers and people all over the country, wrote in 1853 :—"The people complain, and in my opinion with much reason, of the substitution of Bengalee for the vernacular Assamese. Bengalee is the language of the courts, not of the popular books and Shasters, and there is a strong prejudice to its general use. It is because education is imparted to the youth in a foreign tongue that they look only to Government for employ." Assamese is described by Mr. Brown, the best scholar in the province, as a beautiful, simple language, differing in more respects from, than agreeing with, the Bengalee; and I think we made a great mistake in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengalee, and that the Assamese must acquire it. It is too late now to retrace our steps, but I would strongly recommend Anundaram Phookun's proposition to the favourable consideration of Council of Education, viz., the substitution of the vernacular language in lieu of Bengallee, the publication of a series of popular works in the Assamese language, and the completion of the course of vernacular education in Bengalee. "The highly educated native of Assam, quoted by Mr. Mills, stated in Appendix J to Mr. Mills' report that "for more than ten years after the annexation of the province, the Assamese was the language of the courts." And he argued that Assamese was no near akin to Bengalee than Ooriah was, and that the people of Assam had as much claim to use their own vernacular, as had the people of Orissa.

"2. Since Mr. Mills and Anundaram Phookun wrote in 1853, more or less agitation has gone on time to time for the recognition of Assamese as the language of the courts: the missionary and the indigenous schools have continued to teach Assamese ; one or more vernacular newspapers, calling themselves Assamese; have sprung up. The late officiating Commissioner, Colonel Haughton formally recommended that Assamese should be made the language of the courts. Colonel Haughton's recommendation was not approved by the Government of Bengal; but meanwhile all Civil officers serving in Assam were compelled to pass in Assamese, just as Bengal officers have to pass in Bengalee, or North-western provinces officers in Hindustanee. Recently memorials from different parts of Assam have been presented to the Lieutenant-Governor upon the subject; and he has himself held in other parts of India that the vernacular of a people ought not to be elbowed out of a country in favour of another language which happens to be the vernacular of a neighbouring, more numerous and educated people. The tendency of the Government of India and of the legis-

lation of late years has been to permit the vernacular of each province to be used in its courts. The facts and memorials of the last few years have shown that the Assamese Language is still the Vernacular of the people. Accordingly the Lieutenant-Governor caused reports to be called for up on the subject in the following words :—

"His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor has recently had before him more than one petition from Assam, praying that Assamese instead of Bengalee may be made the language of the Government schools and the Government-Courts in Assam. Your opinion on this point, the Lieutenant Governor gathers to be, that Bengalee and Assamese are so nearly akin that Bengalee may well be left as the language both of schools and courts." " But it would appear from Colonel Haughton's letter of the 28th November and also from some of the correspondence quoted above, that Assamese is taught in the Missionary schools; that there are books and a Dictionary published of the Assamese language; and that there have been on and off, from time to time, expressions of feeling in different parts of Assam in favour of the adoption of Assamese as the language of the courts.

"The Lieutenant-Governor would now ask you to consider the matter fully with reference to the above considerations, and to send a copy of this letter to, and obtain from, each of the Deputy Commissioners of your divisions a report upon the languages used in their courts and regarding the propriety of substituting Assamese for Bengalee. The Lieutenant Governor would prarticularly wish to know for each district what language the people speak when they come to court; what they speak at home in their own houses; and whether there do occur from time to time cases of practical difficulty or inconvenience from the use of Bengalee as the court language. His Honor would also inquire what language is taught in the few indigenous schools there may be, and in the mission schools all over the division, and whether any considerable proportion of the amlah of the Assam offices and courts are Assamese. He wishes not only to know whether the objections to the use of Bengalee are insuperable, but also what reason there is for using Bengalee among an Assamese people. *Prima facie* it would seem natural to use Assamese; and if we are to use Bengalee, it must not only be shown that the evils of that course are not intolerable, but also that there is strong reason for adopting an apparently surprising course."

"3. A report has now been received from the Commissioner, together with reports from all the Deputy Commissioners and some

of the more experienced Sub-Divisional Officers in the Valley districts of Assam, and also reports from other officers whom the Commissioner consulted. Colonel Hopkinson is himself decidedly in favour of retaining Bengalee as the language of the courts and schools in Assam. He mentions that no reports are submitted from the hill districts, as neither Bengalee nor Assamese is spoken in those districts.

"4. The Lieutenant-Governor has given his full consideration to the views of the Assam officers, and he is much indebted to them for the careful way in which they have handled this important matter.— The majority of the Deputy Commissioners and experienced Assistant Commissioners are, the Lieutenant-Governor finds, in favour of Assamese and generally it may be observed that the Bengalees, and the officers who have been but a little time in the province, or do not understand its language are against Assamese, while those who have had most practical experience are for it, excepting Mr. A. E. Campbell. This latter officer is employed in the lowest part of the lowest district of Assam ; and seems to have been formerly the advocate of Bengalee, the arguments for which he well puts.

"No amount of argument about derivative affinity can get over the fact clearly testified to, and nowhere really contradicted, that the people of Assam do not understand Bengallee, and that the petitions written in their name and the court proceedings are unintelligible to them; while the recent agitation proves clearly that the majority of the Assamese much wish to have their own language for educational and court purposes.

"5. The only real difficulty in the way of recognising Assamese as the vernacular of the province is the paucity of higher school books in the language and that difficulty is greatly mitigated by the fact, so much dwelt upon by those who favour Bengallee, that a really literate person who knows one of the two languages can soon master the other. For teaching the higher classes of schools, therefore, when Assamese books cannot be got, we must use Bengalee school-books. Subject to this limitation, Assamese must now, the Lieutenant-Governor considers, be introduced into all the courts and schools of the valley districts of Assam. Bengallee words may be employed for technical terms for which there is no Assamese equivalent, and for which English words cannot be conveniently introduced, but for the rest, Assamese must be used bonafide as the court and school language of Assam. The recent careers of the High Court have, it is understood from Major Lamb's and Major Campbell's reports, vir-

tually made the use of Assamese compulsory in petition and such like documents.

"6. In all primary schools Assamese will be taught to the exclusion of Bengalee; also in all middle schools, and in lower middle classes of higher schools. When a class of twelve or more boys wish for it, Bengallee may be separately taught as a language. In the upper classes of higher schools every subject in which there is an Assamese book is to be taught in Assamese; subjects in which Assamese school books do not exist, can be taught either in Bengallee or in English. The Inspector of Schools, Assam Circle, will be at once instructed to make a careful and exact report upon the subject of Assamese school-books now available, and the best means of procuring them.—By order of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. C. Bernard. Offg. Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

"No. 1537. Copy of the foregoing resolution, together with the Commissioner's letter, the reports of the district and subdivisional officers, and of the Inspector of Schools, and the printed extracts from Mr. Moffat Mills' Report and Mr. Dutt's memorandum, forwarded to the Commissioner of Assam, with the request that he will take very early steps for giving effect to the orders of the Government both in the courts and schools of the five valley districts of Assam; and with the intimation that the unprinted residue of the enclosures to his letter have been bound and will be kept among the records of the Government.—By order of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. H. J. S. Cotton, Offg. Asst. Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Calcutta The 9th April, 1873.

High Court Circular: Order No. 8 dated 6th March, 1872, demanding use of Assamese in Judicial Courts of Assam parallel to the order of the Lieutenant-Governor. Notification: Judicial Department Judicial. Calcutta, the 25th July, 1873. "Under the provisions of Act XXIX of 1837, and section 337 of the Criminal Procedure Code, it is hereby notified that Assamese is the language to be used in Judicial and Revenue Proceedings in, and is the ordinary language of the five valley districts of Assam, viz., Kamroop, Durrung, Nowgong, Seebsaugor, and Luckimpore.—By order of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, A. Mackenzie Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal."

Unfortunately the mischief did not stop here as it should have been. Since the Commissioner himself was

against Assamese, he had some Deputy Commissioners and the Director of Public Instruction, besides other subordinate of officers, to support him and to do the needful to prevent inclusion of Assamese still. The following letter speaks eloquently how reactionaries started by putting stumbling blocks on the line of action laid down by the Lieutenant-Governor's order declaring prizes for Assamese primers.

Reactions against Lieutenant Governor's line of action.

"No. 2152. From the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the General Department, to the Director of Public Instruction, Darjeeling, the 18th June, 1873, General Department, Education: "Sir, with reference, to your letter No. 72T, dated 10th June, and enclosures, the Lieutenant-Governor desires me to state that he would not interfere with the orders of the Commissioner of Assam as to the rejection of the primer which you enclose. It appears that the author is Assamese; but the committee who passed the book consist of two Kamrup officers and a native, who, from his name, would seem to be a Bengalee. The primer itself does not seem to be well got up as to type.

"2. The Lieutenant-Governor would suggest, for the consideration of the Commissioner of Assam, that he should offer a reward of Rs. 500 for the best, and Rs. 100 for the second best, set of Assamese primers, to consist of not more than three and not less than two books of twenty duodecimo pages each, the copyright of and property in the prize-books to belong to Government. If Colonel Hopkinson thought right, competitors might be called upon to send in their manuscripts to the Deputy Commissioner of one of the upper or middle Assam districts, not later than the 1st October; and the manuscripts might be submitted to a committee consisting of one civil officer, one educational officer, at least one educated Assamese, and perhaps one of Missionaries who have studied the Assamese language and have been engaged on education in upper or middle Assam. On receiving the Committee's report the Commissioner might award the prizes, select the primers he would adopt for use in Assamese primary schools, and offer an honorarium of Rs. 100 to each of the non-official members of the Committee who may be good enough to take trouble in the matter.

"3. Perhaps it would be best to send the manuscripts down to the Alipore Jail Press, or to the Secretariat or Baptist Mission Press, to be printed. The final proof would be sent up for correction to such officers in Assam as the Commissioner might appoint. When the proofs were finally corrected, the matter could be stereotyped at the Alipore Jail Press, and could then be struck off at a very small outlay for each 10,000 copies that might be wanted. You would be able to arrange with the Deputy Inspector of Schools, Calcutta, for seeing the primers through the press. If each primer could be sold in Assam for half an anna, perhaps its price would be within the means of the poorest.

"4. The Accountant-General will be directed to pass against the grant for the encouragement of vernacular publications any outlay that the Commission of Assam may see fit to incur within the limit of the suggestions conveyed. I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant, C. Bernard, Offg. Secretary to the Government of Bengal."

Deeper mischief. Competition for Assamese Primer.

That the reactionaries did not feel chastised by this mild rebuke contained in the Lieutenant-Governor's letter quoted above, but went still further, will be seen from the following letter.

"No. C/268. From Major W. S. Clarke, Deputy Commissioner, Lukhimpore, to the Personal Assistant to the Commissioner of Assam, Debroogurh, the 30th October, 1873, Sir, I have the honor to submit the report of the Committee appointed under the orders quoted marginally for the selection of "primers" for use in the schools of Assam. Commissioner's letter No. D 535—T dated 5th July, 1873, to the D. C. Lukhimpore; Memo. on the Assamese Primers selected by the Committee appointed with reference to Government Order No. 2152 of 18th. June, 1873.

"Books were sent in by 58 competitors in all, 35 before 1st October, and 28 after that date. The Committee have selected 10 sets of books in all (a) 7 received in time, and (b) 3 after the due date, and consider the books written by Hemchandra Sirma and (his brother) Tulsiram as the best and the 2nd. best, and those sent in by Rev. Clarke as the 3rd. best; and recommended Mrs. Ward's books for consideration. (a) Hemchandra, Tulsiram (Hemchandra's brother) Rev. E. W. Clarke,

Mrs. Ward, Lukhinath, Trilochun, Dehiram, (b) Gungagovind, Radhanath, Roodram.

"I have gone through all the 10 sets of books and am quite disappointed to find that none of them is free from the defect for which the book received with Mr. Martin's letter no, 150 dated May 10th, 1873, had been rejected viz., a large proportion of Bengali words. (On the First Primer for Assamese youths. by Kaliram). The proportion of Bengali words is smallest in Babu Hem Chandra's Primer—which is decidedly the best of all books sent in; but the accompanying extract (p. 19) taken at random from the first part of his book will show that out of 67 words there are more than 40 pure Bengali, and the book contains among others, the following Bengalee phrases and sentences. "Parhibar samayat anya kathat man nidiba". "Pandite sakalo thaite marjyada pai." "Ahar aru Saonei dumah barsha..." "Tomar hat mukh aru kapor sadai nikakai rakhiba." The bold typed words are marked as words used in East Bengal.

"Next to Hemchandra comes his brother Tulsiram—whose book not only contains a much larger proportion of Bengali words, but is defective in other respects too. Pure Bengali (!!) sentences like the following abound....Dhan hale krame sakalo hay....Namra lokak sakaloe mane Dewatar nirmali...murat laba lage....B. Sanskrit sakalo bhashatkai bhal....The instruction contained in the sentence marked A is such as we should not teach in schools supported by Government, and I wonder how the committee recommend a book containing such lessons; and to say that "Sanskrit is the best of all languages", as the author says in the sentence marked B, is, I think, far from correct and we should not, I imagine, teach what is so palpably incorrect....

"11. I must note that the advocates of Assamese will say that many of the words which I have marked as Bengali, are Sanskrit, and it is my conviction that no Assamese book can be written with a smaller proportion of Bengali words than Hemchandra has written (the author of the Farce "Kaniar Kirton"). 12. It is also not easy to understand that when there has been so much difficulty in writing a primer, how are they going to write books for higher classes. 13. In fact, it is simply impossible to exclude Bengali words from so-called Assamese books and documents".

More vindicatory action against Assamese.

The following letter will show how the Commissioner himself applied all the weight of his authority in a vindicatory manner only to gain his point.

"No. 312. From Colonel Henry Hopkinson, Agent Governor General, N. E. Frontier and Commissioner of Assam, to the Director of Public instruction, Calcutta, Dated Gowhatty, 11th. December, 1873....

"2. Sir, You will see that the instruction given in the 2nd. paragraph of the Government letter to you have been faithfully and exactly carried out; but in my opinion neither the labours of the committee nor of the competitors have been successful and I could not recommend for the adoption of Education Department any one of the sets of primers that have been tendered, nor could I conscientiously award either of the prizes to any. For, from the report made of them, I can come to no other conclusion thın that they are one and all Bengali primers more or less thinly disguised by an admixture of local archaic or otherwise corrupted and debased words. . . . (!!).

"3. . . You will see by the contributions of the Seebsagar Missionaries to whom we are chiefly indebted for the agitation in favour of the creation of an Assamese language (!!) that in their attempts to write pure Assamese with very rare exceptions they are writing nothing but "Bengali".... Lastly, you will see that where so-called Assamese has been introduced, not only have we no guarantee or proof that they are words in currency throughout the province, and not words known only to the compilers of the primers or in particular localities where they have lived, but Mr. Martin quotes instances raising grave presumption to the contrary as when an Assamese clerk in his office could not understand the only sentence admitted not to be in Bengali out of a number of sentences in Tulsiram's primer which would be understood by any intelligent Bengali peasant . . . .

"4. I will not trespass on your time and patience by an attempt to go into all grounds on which I have become convinced that this seeking after an "Assamese language" either in the education or any other department is the pursuit of an illusion, but I join with Dr. Martin in thinking that it would be a priceless boon to the cause of education in Assam if you could prevail upon the Government to reinstate Bengali as the proper medium of instruction for our Assam schools (!!)

P.S. I shall be grateful if you will bring this correspodence as early as possible under the notice of His Honour in order that it may be considered with the reference on the subject of the language which I have recently made to Government in the General Department, Education Branch."

The Colonel's secret guides: the three so-called scholars of Bengali.

This last letter from the learned Commissioner to the Director of Public Instruction, Calcutta, with the opinions of three "best Bengali scholars," of course unknown, clearly show the depth to which the enemies of Assam could descend:

"Commissioner's Office, Assam Division. The 6th-1-1874. Opinions of Gopal Ch. Banerjea, Head master Calcutta Normal school, and 2 other best Bengali scholars obtained through Mr. Clarke 1 S. To the Director of Public Instruction. "2. Sir, I am satisfied that the further enquiry is prosecuted the plainer will it appear that at present the hypothesis of the Assamese language, being a distinct one from Bengali, is a monstrous delusion.(!!) I have etc. Commissioner."

Let us refrain from quoting any more matter on this point. To sum up, the menace of Bengali continued almost all through the nineteenth century, nay, even till now in some respects, for which "the provincial patriotism and national conceit of the Bengalees living in Assam" must be held first responsible and then the British Government. This had far-reaching effects and though by the honest efforts of Sir George Campbell necessary steps had been taken to redress the wrong, it had been far from sufficient and the evils of the wrong course have not been totally uprooted. It has not only created a lasting inferiority complex, a Benglophobia which has been so harmful, but it has also to some extent affected the genius of the language in adulterating the native prose style and poetic diction.

Important contributions to Assamese.

Besides the publications already referred to there were sufficient contributions from other quarters throwing light on Assamese. Such are the *Notices of the Languages, Literature and Religions of the Bauddhas of Nepal and Bhot* by B. H. Hodgson, printed at Singapore in 1828, (*Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XVI, p. 409); *Remarks on the Indo-Chinese Alphabets* by Dr. Bastian, printed at Singapore in

1834 (*Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Bengal, Vol. III, Appendix II); *Comparison of Indo-Chinese Languages with Comparative Vocabularies of Bengali, Assamese, Khamti, Siamese, Aka, Abor Mishmi, Burmese etc.* by Rev. Nathan Brown, printed in Calcutta in 1837 (*Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Bengal, Vol. VI, p. 1023); *Grammar of the Assamese Language* by William Robinson printed at Serampur in 1839; *Essays relating to the Language of East Africa, Asia and Australia* by J. R. Logan (1487-1859); *On the Languages Spoken by the Various Tribes Inhabiting the Valley of Assam and Its Mountain Confines* by W. Robinson (1849); *Vocabulary in English and Assamese* by Mrs. S. R. Ward (1854); *Specimens of the Languages of India* by Sir George Campbell (1877); *Phrases in English and Assamese* by Mrs. H. B. L. Cutter (1876); *On the Languages of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula of the Indian Archipelago* by Dr. R. N. Cust (1877).

Christian prose elucidated with examples.

The literature of Assamese since 1830 which we have discussed so far may be exclusively styled as Christian Assamese. What this epithet exactly means needs a little elucidation. There is no denying the fact that these Baptist Missionaries worked with all earnestness and regard, but in spite of their best endeavours these visitors from the New World must have naturally failed at least in certain things to grasp the genius of Assamese, and there were bound to be certain elements in their composition that smelled foreign. This has been nicknamed as 'Christian' Assamese. The following sentence, from *Jātrikar Jātrā*, rendered from Bunyan's famous work *Pilgrim's Progress*, and appearing in the periodical *Orunodoi* (1846-80) may illustrate the point:—

"Ene awasthā halat sei mānuh gharalai gai āpon larā-tirotāi nubujibalai jimānalaike pārichil āponār petat dukh damankai rākhi thaichil, kintu asantosh bārhi galat sarah kāl rākhiba noārile; ei hetuke krame tirotā āru larār āgat pet bhāngi ei rupe kabalai dharile bole mor petar larātihant, tomālokar ati bethār mitir ji mai, sarvanās haichon."

This style is surely not natural and idiomatic Assamese, and there is certainly something foreign about it. This is now gone. But its merits live till this day. The first of such merits seems even to accompany their very defect. It is what may be called "broken Assamese" which they wrote; and this has a charm of its own that only compares with the broken words spoken by a child in any native speech.

Merits of Christian prose.

The second point in regard to the merits of Christian Assamese is its enriching the Assamese vocabulary by bringing into use a large number of Assamese words fast becoming obsolete and lost, and by coining others into elegant Assamese. While in the early period of Assamese we find a large number of indigenous words and forms in use even in the Buddhist songs, *Caryās and Dohās*, there seems to have been an attempt at Sanskritising, the language in the Vaiṣṇavite period. Another attempt at Sanskritising the language seems to have begun in the modern period with Hemcandra Baruwā, the lexicographer. But the Baptist Missionaries made a sincere attempt at making the spoken and written speech perfectly agree. Hence they often used the more colloquial forms of speech and always preferred the use of indigenous words generally so simple and sweet. Their special credit lies in the fine coining of words so large in number. One simple instance may be given in the word 'latā paniyal' which they preferred to the word 'āngur' for the English word 'grapes'.

Christian Assamese enriched the vocabulary.

It is often complained that the Baptist Missionaries corrupted the Assamese orthography. But those who know must admit that it is not the Baptist Missionaries who introduced that new spelling. It is of course true that by

Baptist Missionaries not responsible for the so-called Missionary Spelling.

their temperament, the Americans seem inclined to simplification as they have done in the case of English ; but in regard to Assamese it is somebody else who was first responsible for this, and the Baptist Missionaries only supported it, since they found that Assamese masses rather followed this pronunciation more than they did the Sanskrit one. The following extract from Dr. Miles Bronson's dictionary may finally clear this point. "The system of orthography adopted in this work is that of Jaduram Barua, a learned Assamese Pandit, which it is believed much better corresponds with the actual pronunciation of the people than any other system met with (See Introduction to Brown's *Grammatical Notices*, p. ix). Nowgong, August 12th, 1867, Mr. Bronson." And about Jaduram Baruwa we shall have occasion to write. A similar explanation, it is remembered, was given in the *Orunodoi* by its learned editor on the point.

The last but not the least contribution of these Christians is its opening the door of Assamese literature to the west.

Opening the door to the west.

Though the chronicles on secular subjects were written even side by side with the Vaiṣṇavite works from about the sixteenth century, and though there were a few scattered works on arithemetic, astronomy or astrology, medicine and science, still the whole atmosphere of Assamese literature till now was certainly fully charged with almost mediaeval ideas of religion or theosophy. As we shall presently see even such secular subjects as history, written right about the middle of the nineteenth century in the British period, was written in verse and simply to prove the transitoriness of the world and worldy powers. By the impact of the new ideas of the world, these missionaries helped to end medievalism and the rise of modernism.

This so-called Christian Assamese also shaped the Assamese vocabulary to suit new ideas and expressions and

to meet the new demands. They have already shaped modern Assamese for dignified prose by rendering the *Bible* into Assamese keeping the scriptural dignity of style in tact. They now coined necessary words for writing the history of different countries and nations of the world, and for giving news and views of various scientific discoveries. Thus they not only liberated the spirit of the Assamese from the bondage of the old-world ideas in the domain of thought but they also widened the confines of the language and made it quite suitable for using it in modern life.

Christian Assamese shaping Assamese vocabulary to suit both scrip'ural dignity and modern needs.

Besides we have already shown what part the Baptist Missionaries played in removing the usurpation of Bengali from Assamese schools and courts. We conclude this subject by quoting an extract from a letter given as Appendix E in Mills' *Report on the Province of Assam*: "We might as well think of creating a love of knowledge in the mind of a stupid English boy by attempting to teach him French before he knew anything of the rudiments of English. To my own mind, this feature of the educational policy pursued in Assam is not only absurd, but destructive of the highest motives of education and must necessarily cripple the advancement of the schools, as well as separate them from the sympathies of the people." (Appendix E. A letter from A. H. Danforth, Missionary Gowhatty 10th July 1853).

We have so far dealt with foreign writers of Assamese who did their level best for the welfare of modern Assamese. Political and educational circumstances were responsible for the rather slow appearance of native Assamese writers in the field of literature. It is because English rule was a new thing in Assam now and the people were not acclamatized to it. The English school-master too was not yet abroad, and the people had to meet the English officer

Comparatively late appearance of local writers.

through his Bengali subordinates who were ignorant of Assamese. And thirdly, it took time for the people to quite yet overcome shocks of the late brutal Burmese invasions and the after-effects of the earlier rebellions of the Māyāmarās, and then to adapt themselves to the new environment. Nevertheless it was not too late when they got ready and appeared.

J. B.'s *Dictionary* (1839) and spelling reform.

We have already referred to Jadurām's *Assamese-Bengali Dictionary* presented to Colonel Jenkins who made it over to the Baptist Missionaries in 1839, and also to the fact of his being regarded as an authority of the system of Assamese orthography used by the Missionaries in *Orunodoi* (1846-80) and in Bronson's *Dictionary* (August, 1867). Earlier in the translation of the *Bible* by the Serampore missionaries and elsewhere, the present system of orthography was in vogue and was later restored by Hemcandra Baruwā not long after. Jaduram was undoubtedly a great personality of his time. He was born in 1802 and died in 1869 at Jorhat.

Maṇirām Dewān Barbhandār Baruwā (1806-58) was born at Chāring in the old east Rungpur (Sibsagar) town to Rāmdatta Dol-Kāṣariā Baruwā. During the first horrible Burmese invasion, this family fled to Cilmāri and at last returned to Jorhat with king Purandar Siṅha. Even during these troublous times Maṇirām acquired sufficient knowledge of Persian and Bengali, and was the brave lad of eighteen summers who led the army under Captain Harsebara from Gauhati to Kaliābar at Nowgong, when David Scott and Davidson pursued the Burmese to Upper Assam. After occupying ths Burmese fort at Rungpur (Sibsagar), Baddingsfield took Maṇirām as his guide to conquer the hill tribes by persuasion. It was in this excursion that tea-leaves were first discovered in Assam, when one leader of Simphos presented Davidson with tea-leaves which they used to

call 'phināp'. Returning from this excursion subduing the tribes of Simphos, Khāsis and others, Maṇirām became a favourite with the English officers as a very intelligent young man.

Maṇirām was soon made a Collectory Mirmunshi and Peskar. The court of Rungpur then used to sit about the Jaysagar tank and two parliamentary houses, senior and junior, known as Bar Pancāyat and Saru Pancāyat of old, used to help Captian Newfville in his judicial decisions. Maṇirām used to wield immense influence even as the Collectory Peskār and won the nickname of Kalitā Rajā which title lives till this day. Maṇirām's great statemanship is revealed in the Reports he submitted, the first to Jenkins when he came with a Manipuri king in 1832 to enquire into the economic condition of Assam; and the second on the 23rd Baisakh, 1775 Sak (1853 A. C.) to Moffat Mills both on his behalf and on behalf of Prince Ghanakānta Siṅha. Maṇirām became the prime minister to king Purandar Siṅha on the first Baisakh, 1755 Sak (1833 A. C.) and secured the title of Barbhandār Baruwā. He became the Dewān of the Assam Company and the Sheristadar of the East India Company. On an allegation of treason, Maṇirām was executed and hanged at Jorhat on the 16th Falgun, 1779 Sak (corresponding to February 26, 1858).

Maṇirām's *Buranji Vivek Ratna* (1838).

A history of Assam compiled by this busy man in manuscript, styled as *Buranji Vivek Ratna*, has been preserved by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam. It was compiled in 1838 and the events are described in a life-like manner by this great politician and patriot up-to-date.

Kāśināth Tāmuli Phukan (1810-80) was the eldest of the four sons of Śrināth and was the grandsom of Śiva-

nāth, belonging to the family of Kakatiār of Sibsagar. Kāśīnāth was one of the officers of king Purandara Siṅha's court when the latter began his rule after 1832 under the East India Company, and was thus a colleague of Maṇirām Dewān. He collaborated a *History of Assam* (since published by the American Baptist Mission Press in 1844), with Rādhānāth Bar Baruwa who was a scholar in Ahom, Persian and Bengali languages. Kāśīnāth became a Munsif and Rādhānātha a Sadar Amin under the British. This *History of Assam* (*Assam Burānji*) is the first of its kind printed in Assamese, compiled from old chronicles.

Kāśīnāth Tāmuli Phukan and Rādhānāth Bar Baruwā's *Asam Buranji* (1844).

Harakānta Baruwā (1813-1900) was born at North Gauhati, and was a Sadar Amin under the British. He compiled another *History of Assam* sometime about 1870-88 A. C., printed by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in 1928. In his preface he refers to Kāśīnāth and Rādhānāth's *History*, and says that he added many things to the history compiled by Kāśīnāth and Rādhānāth.

Harakānta Baruwā's *Asam Buranji* (1870-80).

Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan (1829-59), whose birth year has practically been regarded as the starting point of the modern period of Assamese literature was born at Gauhati on Tuesday, the 7th Āśvina 1751 Śak era, corresponding to about 24th September 1829, to Prasuti Devī and Haliram Dhekial Phukan who himself was renowned for scholarship and literary merit. He began his studies in the fifth year and soon read such Sanskrit works as *Ratnamālā* and *Mugdhabodha* and also learnt the vernacular. In 1837 he was admitted to the Government High School at Gauhati which was established two years earlier. He made good progress in English, and at

Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan (1829-59), his early life and education.

F. 16

the encouragement of Messrs Methi and Jenkins Ānandarām with another friend of his left for Calcutta during the rains of 1841. There was neither railway nor steamers in those days and they reached their destination after 25 days by boats via Sirajganj, Dacca and Sunderban. He then got hfimsel admitted to the third standard of the junior branch of the Hindu College, but early in 1842 his companion died. In 1844 Ānandarām was promoted to the third standard of the senior branch, of the Hindu College, but in November of the same year he returned home.

His family life and early death.

In his sixteenth year Ānandarām married Māhindri. By this wife one daughter and two sons were born to him. Victoria, the Queen Empress took over the administration of India from the East India Company in her own hands on the 19th November, 1858; and Ānandarām himself made the Assamese translation of the Queen's *Proclamation*. He died early, on the 16th June, 1859, when he was only 29 years old.

Asamiyā Larār Mitra (1849.)

Anandarām began his early literary exercise in Assamese in the pages of *Orunodoi* in the forties of the nineteenth century. Then he compiled a series of useful *Assamese Readers* from various English works and sent two volumes of it to be printed in the Samācār Candrikā Press at Calcutta where two earlier works of his father were printed. But they said they could not print them as they knew nothing of Assamese, and Ānandarām had to send over one Kirttikānta Baruwā to Calcutta for the purpose. Thus the first two volumes of *Asamiyā Larār Mitra* were issued in 1849. Messrs Methi and Jenkins, his earlier friends and guides, helped Ānandarām a good deal in regard to the compilation and publication of this series ; but for paucity of funds further volumes of this series could not be published.

Ānandarām acquired sufficient knowledge of Persian, read *Gulistan* and *Rawaistan*, and committed the poems of *Pandenama* to memory. We have already referred to Ānandarām's learned monograph submitted to Moffat Mills in the rains of 1853 and included in the latter's *Report on the Province of Assam* as Appendix J. We have also quoted the relevent portions from the monograph in regard to "Education and Schools" and "Language of the Courts." But it covered a much larger number of subjects than we might imagine. Paragraphs XXX to LX cover such topics as Assam's Revenue System, Rates of Assessment, Agriculture, Manufactures, Education and Schools, Public Works, Religious and Charitable Endowments, Opium Cultivation, Population, Mortality, Medical Science and Medical Schools, the Judicial System, the Police and Moffusil Courts, the Rural Police, Law of Procedure, Law of Evidence. Oath, Execution of Decrees, Redress in the Criminal Courts, Administration of Hindoo Law and Legal Opinions, Judges and Vakeels, Language of the Courts, Registry of Deeds, Registration of Marriage etc. This shows the great range of his knowledge of the various topics of his country at an early age of 24 years.

A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language (1855)

We have also referred to Ānandarām's anonymous learned work "*A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language*" by "A Native" issued in 1855, and also quoted the very encouraging observations on it by foreign writers such as Mrs. S. R. Ward. In it Ānandarām displays vast knowledge of the contents of Assamese literature. His account was far from a mere bird's-eye view and he gave an analysis of as many as 62 religious works and 40 dramatic works which called for no mean knowledge of the literature. His clear exposition of his subject in English also revealed sufficient command over the foreign language.

It is needless to indulge in the many would-have-beens of Ānandarām's life which was so sadly cut off before he attained his maturity, but we must mention here a few of the many works which he has left half-done. The most important of such works are his English to Assamese and Assamese to English *Dictionaries*, which were advertized and a few pages printed as model in *Orunodoi* (pp. 180-82, Vol. XI, no. 12 December 1856), edited by A. H. Danforth with necessary editorial comments on it.

Anandarām's unfinished *Dictionaries* (1866).

We quote the first word only, to show how perfect and scholarly Ānandarām's lexicon had been, and how long before Hemcandra Baruwā he attempted at a reformation of the spellings used by the missionaries :

" Abacus, S,... khelar nāibā anka bā sakar dhal anka falir nicinā pāt : itār bā silar thumar mur bā mathāwuri bā opar dokhar paki gharar itār bā silar khuntār mur "....Asamiyā bhāṣā janā panditsakale śabdabilakar artha āru jidare ākhar jotoa gaiche, tāk chāi ji dosh-guṇ dekhe tāk anugrahkai likhiba. A. Phu."

That the suggestion of Ānandarām in regard to changing the system of orthography used by the missionaries provoked their thoughts about it, appears from an editorial remark in *Orunodoi* Vol. XIII, no. 1 (January 1858). "Āgar dare likhā nohoā ene kichu kichu kathāo chapā thāke : arthāt purve Śrijukta Brown sāhābe likhār dare krame āmār likhā chapā haichil ; kintu anek panditbilāke sei rupe ākhar likhāt bhāl nepāi. Sibilāke bhābichile bole missionarybilāke. Asamiyā ākhar sudhkai likhiba nejāne" ...... This thinking process of course found its consummation in Hemcandra Baruwā's overhauling of the entire system of orthography in the present form.

His suggestion of reforming the system of spelling.

Bronson's *Dictionary* might have been prompted also by this attempt of Ānandarām which remained apparently

unfruitful. It may be said in this connexion that the science of lexicography was no gift of the English language, and that like the *Amara-koṣa* in Sanskrit, Assamese lexicography was studied long before the introduction of the English language into Assam. Like the Buranjis or Chronicles, the Assamese language seems indebted to the Ahoms for lexicons. *Bar-Amra* and *Mati-Amra* are the first attempts at writing dictionaries from and to Assamese or Kāmarūpī speech to and from the Tāi or Āhom language, at an early stage of Āhom rule for the common convenience of the ruler and the ruled. A later Assamese dictionary was compiled in 1890 by one Rucināth Kāmarūpī, now preserved in the India Office Library, London.

Bar-Amra and *Mati-Amra*, early Ahom Assamese lexicons etc.

The essay as a type of Assamese literature, began as a gift of English literature, where it existed from an early period.

Ānandarām as a pioneer of essay writing in Assamese.

The early Assamese Vaiṣṇavite prose was not used for secular subjects, as the Buranji or Chronicle prose was not tried for different modern scientific subjects; while the Christian prose which dealt with the modern subjects was defective in the sense that it made palpable mistakes in idioms etc. and was therefore sometimes a bit too unnatural.

While in matter the Christian prose is both religious like the Vaiṣṇavite prose, and secular like the history prose, in manner it follows rather the latter with a large majority of 'tadbhava' indigenous words of soft sounds. The greatest gift contributed to Assamese literature by this prose was that of bringing it in touch with modernism. The subject of its immediate predecessor, history prose, was mundane, but not modern. Thus we find the process of evolution of Assamese prose from the Vaiṣṇavite to the history, from the history to the Christian, and finally

Christian prose and modern prose.

from the Christian to modern prose. The synthesis of all this is the modern national literature in Assamese. The modern prose has not a bombastic, artificial style loaded with high-sounding Sanskrit words, but is as simple and natural as the history prose or the so-called Christian prose, treating all sorts of religious and secular subjects with ease and efficiency.

Ānandarām shows all their featu.es.

Thus, in modern prose all these forces meet leaving the defects behind and we may call Ānandarām the personification of this union; and we know no earlier native writer of this period who could command such a force. The best example of Ānandarām's style and patriotism in the essays is embodied in his article *Inglāndar Vivaraṇ* published in *Orunodoi*. It has something about it which surpasses all the defects of its immediate predecessors. We quote a passage from it:

"He Kripāmay Jagadiśvar, ei Asam deśar loksakalak svadeś sabhya giāni āru dhārmik karibalai mati diā, sibilākar abhāw aru durawasthā jānibalai sibilākak giān diā, āru tomār bicitra śaktire sibilākak sabhya karā āru tomāk jānibar āru ājnā pālibar jogya karā." "Jisamayat Asam hābi guci ful bāri haba; nait dongā guci jahaj haba, ghar bānhar guci sil itār haba, gāone gāone hāzāre hāzāre parhā sāli, giānar sabhā, cikitsālay, dukhiā daridrar paritrānar ālay haba; āru jikālat loksakale paraspar hiṅsā nakari ātāie ātāki bhrātrivat ceneh kariba, kenwe dutakā kānir salani michā sākhi nidiba lakh-takāko kāti kari thaba, koti takā bheti pāio kāro anyāi nakariba, besyā kāni āru surā ei kathā desat loke bhu nopoā haba, sei samay, he Param Pitā Jagadīśvar, śīghre ghatoā".

That is—'When Assam will be converted from a forest to a flower-garden, the canoes of the rivers will be converted to ships, bamboo cottages will be replaced by buildings of stones and bricks; when there will be thousands and thousands of schools, educational gatherings, dispensaries, hospitals for the poor and destitute; and when people instead of entertaining jealousy will cherish love for one another, none

will give false evidence for two tolās of opium and rather will throw aside lacs of rupees in such cases ; when no one will do mischief to others being offered bribes of crores of rupees ; prostitution, opium and wine will be unknown in the country, that time, O God, the Almighty Father, bring about in no time.'

Patriotism in Assamese prose.

This is unassuming unlike the Vaiṣṇavite prose, and forceful as we do not commonly find the prose of the chronicles, and is idiomatic and natural as the Christian prose is often not. And there is in it something besides. The patriotism or vigour in it is a new element in Assamese prose and it is surely a gift of the new influence.

Influence of English style and syntax over Assamese.

Besides the element of patriotism, described above, we find in a more distinct manner another element of mixed good. It is the influence of English language, style and syntax. Any Assamese reader, not conversant with the English language, will find several foreign elements even in this essay though its vocabulary and grammar are Assamese beyond doubt. Such ways of saying as 'prathamate', 'dvitiyate' (first, secondly etc.) were certainly unknown to Assamese prose before this, though such ways of course help to impress one's points on the audience perhaps better. Again, such emphasis with the word 'je' as in 'jānibāje tomālokei" sounds almost as a literal translation of 'know that . . .you', and was originally foreign to Assamese as such. This we would call an adulteration of the language had it tended to weaken the Assamese; but since it has not done so in the present case we would like to call it strengthening of the prose.

His place in modern Assamese literature.

Ānandarām was undoubtedly a great personality of this age in spite of his early death. Colonel Hopkinson, an ex-Commissioner of Assam, compares Ānandarām with Raja Ram Mohan Rai

of Bengal, and says that considering the peculiar circumstances of Assam in which Ānandarām was placed, one is bound to call him even a greater genius than Raja Ram Mohan. In personal appearance and personal magnetism the two great contemporaries of Assam and Bengal were alike. In his *Literature of Bengal*, R. C. Dutt, the great Bengali scholar, styles Raja Ram Mohan as the father of Bengali prose in general, and we may call Ānandrām also the father of modern Assamese prose with some limitations, and with it add that he was the first Assamese to join hands with the missionaries in the fight against Bengali. His essay, *Inglandar Vivaraṇ* which appeared in *Orunodoi* (Vol. II, no. 4 : April, 1847) was apparently written in the eighteenth year of his life. He was just twenty years old when, with the help of Murray's Encyclopaedia he issued his *Bhugol-Śikṣaka* consisting of 177 pages, and his *Asamiyā-Śikṣak* containing 222 pages, on various subjects such as geography, history and science, as the first and second volume respectively of his series known as *Asamiyā Larār Mitra*. These and such other works, though not themselves so great, yet by their promises and ideals, assure Ānandarām a high place in the history of modern Assamese literature.

Hemcandra Baruwā (1835-96), his parentage and early education.

Hemcandra Baruwā (1835-96) was born in the Rajābāhar village at Sibsagar on the 10th December, 1835. He was the second son by the second wife of Muktārām Baruwā renowned for his Sanskrit learning and was well-versed in the science of medicine. Hemcandra was taught by his father to commence his learning first with declension of Sanskrit words without introducing him the alphabet separately, in his ninth year, Hemcandra thus went on with cursory studies of Sanskrit and studying ancient Assamese works as Droṇa Parva and Karṇa Parva of the *Mahābhārata* by himself, till November 1847.

His education suffered by the death of his father from cholera, when his uncle, a collectory Sheristadar, Lakṣmīnāth Baruwā, brought over his deceased brother's family from Rajābāhar to Sibsagar town, where Hemcandra was appointed an apprentice to a clerk in the court on a salary of rupees four per month. Hemcandra's thirst for learning was too great to be stopped by such obstacles, and so he found time in the morning and evening to study Sanskrit in the private institution of Urbidhar Sivasāgariā Baruwā and to learn Hindi and Brajabuli in Devanāgari script in the quarters of Captain Brodey, the then Deputy Commissioner, Sibsagar. With Brodey too he began to learn a little English ; but when his uncle knew it, he stopped it altogether lest his nephew should become an outcaste by learning the language of the Mlecchas. But even then he did not quite give up his idea of learning English, and he approached the Baptist Missionaries of Sibsagar for it.

His studies of Sanskrit, Assamese, Hindi, Brajabuli and English.

Meanwhile Hemcandra used to contribute to *Orunodoi* with particular regard to overhauling the system of orthography of Assamese as used by the missionaries. In his own autobiographical sketch in *Jonāki* he writes :—" Mai tār (Orunodoir) varṇavinyās saṅśodhanar nimitte jatna karibalai dharilon. Mor ei ceṣṭāt Nidhi Levi Farwell nāmere etā deśī Christiānar parā bar bādhā pāichilon. Si tār guru Brown Sāhābar varṇavinyāsar praṇālir ek āngulo lar-car hoāk mahā pāp jen bhābichil .... Tār kathāt Nidhiye jancarek Dāngariāro mat laichil." Any way, it was Hemcandra who succeeded in the long run, and with the help of Reverend Comfort he could get the use of the old Assamese letter 'wa' re-instated in the orthography. But everything was all right only after he began to print his own books commencing with his *Ādi Pāṭh* in the seventies of the last century.

Reforming the Assamese spelling.

It may be remarked in passing that in the courts the knowledge of English was not necessary in those days for the ordinary run of clerks, all of whom rather hated it. Only the Munsif and Sheristadars had to know a little English. Hemcandra's knowledge of English, in spite of the odds, grew sufficiently more, and it could not be kept a secret. Now his uncle too instead of rebuking Hemcandra for learning English rather sought his help in translating certain important documents of the court into English. In 1858 Hemcandra became a Revenue Peshkar in the Golaghat court, and then served as a Second Master in the Sibsagar Government High School, but both were temporary posts. Then he became a Revenue Mahafes at Rs. 25/- per mensem which post he held till 1862. In August of the same year, Hemcandra was appointed a translator at Gauhati by Major Agnew the then Judicial Commissioner of Assam. Thence he was promoted to be the Office Superintendent of the Commissioner which post he retained till he retired on the 1st January, 1881, with a pension of Rs. 83/5/3. He was twice offered the post of an extra-Assistant Commissioner in 1875 and 1876 which he twice refused lest it should be a hindrance to his literary life.

His gradual recognition in Government service and his retirement.

Hemcandra Baruwā's genius is manifest in his acquisition of a thorough knowledge of several languages without attending any regular educational institution. As a matter of fact, next to Ānandarām Hemcandra was one of the few persons of Assam who had the reputation of having a command over the English language, and people from different places of the province drew near him to get important representations drafted by him in English. And this knowledge of English he acquired secretly and stealthily in the quarters of English officials or Christian Missionaries. His command of Sanskrit was also no less great though this

knowledge too he acquired in no regular way. Hemcandra himself composed and read a Sanskrit poem on the occasion of Sir Stuart Bailey's first entrance to Gauhati as the Chief Commissioner of Assam; and this Sanskrit poem was not only greatly admired by the audience, but was also committed to memory by many learned Assamese gentlemen.

H. B's *Ādi Pāṭh* (1873), *Svāsthyar Nyam* etc.

By the Government notification no. 2152 dated the 18th June, 1873, Hemcandra competed with as many as 58 writers both native and American and secured the first prize of Rs. 500/- from the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and Assam, for the best Assamese primer *Ādi Pāṭh*. He was also given to translate the Government pamphlet, *Way to Health*, into Assamese as *Asamiyā Svāsthyar Niyam*. Thus, Hemcandra obtained Rs. 1,100/- as rewards from the Government, besides securing Government's recognition for helping Babu Rajendralal Mitra in collecting old Sanskrit manuscripts from Assam.

His contribution to *Orunodoi* (1836), *Asamiya Vyakaran* (1859), and *Asamiya Larar Vyakaran* (886).

Early in April 1856, we find such articles as "Anek bia karā ajugut" (It is wrong to marry many) written by one 'Śrī Sonār Chānd' (Golden Moon) in *Orunodoi* (Vol. XI. no. 4) who must have been no other than Hem (Gold)-Candra (Moon) himself. Even later writers like Pāṇindranāth Gagai who exactly followed Hemcandra's footsteps in compiling Assamese primers, used this very name as "Soṇar Cānd Dekā Baruwā" in his *Larā Sikṣā*, the next best primer in Assamese till this day, evidently making a respectful reference to Hemcandra Bāruwā. In 1859, Hemcandra's *Asamiyā Vyākaraṇ* was issued by the American Baptist Mission Press, and the same work with some modifications was reprinted in 1886 as *Asamiyā Larār Vyākaraṇ* making it specially suitable for school children.

Hemcandra's monumental work in the Assamese language undoubtedly is his *Hema-Koṣa* which, however, could not be brought to light in his life time, not till 1900 A. C., or four years after the author's death, when it was published by Colonel P. R. T. Gordon with the assistance of Hemcandra Goswāmi. But about December 1892, he brought out a school edition of it, like his *Asamiyā Larār Vyākaraṇ* and called it *Parhāsaliẓ Abhidhān*; and then brought out *Saṅkṣipta Hema-Koṣa*, evidently another abridged edition. His *Hemakoṣa* was the fruit of his life-long labours and he took the English *Webster Dictionary* as his model, and it was a single-handed work as that of Dr. Johnson in English. It contained the etymology and meaning of as many as 22,346 Assamese words and was undoubtedly a great improvement on Dr. Bronson's work.

Parnasalia Abhidhan (1892), *Samkshipta Hom-Kosh* and *Hemkosh* (1900).

Hemcandra's other works are his *Pāṭhamālā*, with stories from English and Sanskrit works and lessons on scientific and other subjects for education of the young people; *Kāniyār Kirttan* showing the vices of Assamese opium-eaters; and his *Bāhire Rang-Cang Bhitare Koā-Bhāturi* depicting other vices of the Assamese society, and the irreligious deeds of the so-called religious people. In his English work, *Marriage System in Assam*, Hemcandra Baruwā, an early advocate of widow marriage, supports his view from the practices in vogue in Assam. All these works show the ardent reformer in Hemcandra, with sweeping satires and even brutal attacks of his *Kāniyār Kirttan* and *Koā-Bhāturi*. In such aspects, Hemcandra seems to have anticipated his family descendant and literary successor Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā who carried them on. Early in his life Hemcandra lost his wife in 1865 after a female child was born to her in 1863. On principle he did not marry a second time, the reasons of which he put forth in his autobiographical sketch.

Pāṭhamālā, Kāniyār Kirttān, Koā Bhāturi. and *Assamese Marriage System.*

Soon after his retirement in 1881, Hemcandra undertook the editing of the Anglo-Assamese weekly published from Gauhati by two eminent Assamese, Mānik Candra Baruwā and Ānandarām Phukan then forming a company as Baruwā-Phukan Brothers in 1882. Its subscribers numbered about nine hundred. The paper styled *Assam News*, was very ably edited by this veteran literateur and it is through this paper that the present etymological orthography of Assamese was first fully re-vindicated and re-established. It then became the source of inspiration for other writers who gradually began to adopt this system regularly. The paper, whatsoever be the reason, came to be discontinued from July 1885; but its influence survived long after.

The weekly *Assam News* (1882-85).

Hemcandra was a towering personality of his age no doubt and a worthy dictator to be sure. In his personal manners, whims and even in his idiosyncrasies, he had many things resembling George Bernard Shaw. He was indeed a difficult man to approach and was certainly rigid and unsparing in his ways. He decried and hated all shams and hypocrisies of the orthodox society being himself affiliated to it by birth, and he put them all to derision and brutal laughter in his writings and in his personal life. He was a strong advocate of widow marriage, as we have said, from his early life. He had of course a touch of the spirit of a reformer.

His reforming zeal.

Hemcandra's true literary output was of course not much, but within the small range he proved himself to be a powerful prose writer. This is manifest in his dramatic sketch of *Kāniyār Kirttan* (Stories of Opium-eaters) and in the merciless caricatures of *Kowā-Bhāturi* (or the hollow society). We quote an extract from the latter:

As a powerful prose-writer.

"Korkhaniyā Satrar Govardhan Dew Ātā param Vaiṣṇav Kaṁsa rajār candan jogāti kunji bāir vaṁsar jāt, sākṣāt gurujanar parā

paramārthar bhāg powā Gopināth Dew Ātār parināti. Ghoṣā Kirttan Ratnāwali, ei tini khani sāstra prabhur osthāgra ; iāt bāje Guṇmālā bhatimā, capay, totay, eibilāk mukhe ākhai futār dare fute. Bargitat Gosāindew ene pārgat, teon puatiyā niṣā git dharile ocarar gach bilākeo gā laroār chalere tāl dhare, āru kukur-siāleo premat bāul hai rāg diye."

Here is described a certain fictitious figure of the head of a religious institution who claims a fabulous origin from the humpbacked woman who was so devoted to Kṛṣṇa. Then he makes a satirical reference to his superficial knowledge of the scriptures in Assamese, and then to his proficiency in music saying, "This religious head was such a past master in singing religious songs that when he would begin singing before dawn the trees nearby would, by way of moving, mark the cymbal, and the dogs and cats would join his tune being intoxicated with divine love."

In his famous autobiographical sketch Hemcandara shows himself a master of serious dignified prose in measured language and compact style, neither verbose, excessively ornamental nor Sanskritized and heavy, but elegant, logical and forceful :

A dignified prose.

"Mai punarāi biyā nakarilon. Āji-kāli āmār samājar awasthālai cāi bhārjyā marā puruṣe punarai biyā karoā gotai nindaniya. Mai bhābi cālon : mor bharjyār nahai mor mrityu howā hale teonr ki awastha halheten ? Teon mariche ; tathāpi mor icchā halai mai etā kiya, tinitā bā adhik biyā kariba pāron kintu bidhawā howār pāchat punar biyār nām lowā mātrei teonr jāti galhetan, Samāje barjileheten āru teon jiwantate marā jen hai thākileheten. E kene asangat ! kene ajugut !! "

That is, "I did not marry a second time. Considering our present (social) circumstances it is totally condemnable for the widowers to marry. I thus pondered over the subject : what would have taken place if death would overtake me and not my wife ? She is now dead, and yet I can contract three, why, more marriages ; but just

after my wife had become a widow, the moment when she had uttered the name of marriage she would be outcaste, discarded by society, and she would know what is death in life. O, how inconsistent! how wrong !!"

He concludes :

"Sāstra nālāge juktilai cālei bidhawār biāt je kono doṣ nāi, tāk bujiba pāri...Pujāniyā Vidyāsāgare bidhawā bibāh je śāstra-siddha iāk sapramāṇ kariyei mane mane nāthākil, āponār putekere saite vidhawāk biyā dile. Kālar sontat teon uti gal, kintu tār bālit teon ji khojar sānc thai gaiche, si cirakālalai thākiba, lupta nahay; sei khojar pāchat calotā mānuh āmār deśat olāba ketiyā? Pratidhvaniye sudhiche 'ketiya?'

That is—"Not to speak of its sanction in the scriptures, one can see that there is no harm in widow marriage even when one comes to reason...The revered Vidyāsāgar did not keep quiet by simply proving that widow marriage is sanctioned by religious works of the Hindus, but he also got his son married to a widow. He has drifted away in the current of time, but the foot-prints which he has left on the sands of time will remain for ever and never be lost. When will there be born such men in our country as will follow his footsteps? The echo resounds—'When?" This is undoubtedly a natural, life-like and vigorous prose, though of English influence, and certainly far in advance of his senior contemporary Ānandarām.

Influence of English on his prose.

Guṇābhirām Baruwā (1837-94) was born at Jorhat in 1759 Śak to Raṇarām Baruwā by his second wife. They were near relations of Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan and so when Raṇarām died the following year Ānandarām took charge, whenever he was capable of it, of this orphan and the widow. Thus it was Ānandrām who sent Guṇābhirām to Calcutta and got him admitted into the Colootala Branch School

Guṇābhirām Baruwā's (1837-94), early life and education.

there. Guṇābhirām was one of the few Assamese students who were educated in Calcutta before the University of Calcutta was established. He passed the Entrance examination in 1854, and securing a scholarship got himself admitted to the Presidency College the same year.

The Calcutta New Press was purchased and established by Ānandarām in the name of Guṇābhirām in 1852.

His marriage and return from Calcutta.

Gunābhirām left his First Arts Course and began to study Law in the Presidency College. Then on the 18th Agrahāyaṇ, 1779 Śak (about December 4 1857) Guṇābhirām was married to Braja Sundari, and this union also was brought about by Ānandarām as his guardian. When unexpectedly the latter died on the 16th June 1859, Guṇābhirām was compelled to return from Calcutta and find out some means of maintenance for both the families.

Guṇābhirām, however, had not to wait long and as early as October 1859, he was appointed a Sub-Assistant Commissioner; and in January, 1860, he was promoted to be an Extra-Assistant Commissioner.

His life and retirement.

Immediately he arranged to send Ānandrām's first son Rādhikārām (born in December 1855) to London for foreign education,; educated his second son, Annadārām (born December 27, 1856), in India, and took all possible care of Ānandarām's daughter (born January 9, 1853) and his widow. Guṇābhirām retired on the 31st March, 1890.

Guṇābhirām's family life was not as happy as it could be expected. His first wife Braja Sundari paid the debt of nature as early as July, 1867, without leaving any issue. An ardent advocate of widow-marriage as Guṇābhirām had been since his school life, he married Viṣṇupriyā, the widow of Paraśurām Baruwā, soon in 1870, and had several issues by her. In February 1871, his eldest daughter Svarṇalatā

and on the 2nd June 1874, his son Karuṇābhirām were born and they were succeeded by some others. Guṇābhirām's daughter Svarṇalatā also became a widow, and she too was given in marriage a second time. He wanted to pass his retired life in Calcutta, and accordingly he purchased a plot of land there and would erect a building soon. But his wife Viṣṇupriyā died on the 26th March 1892, and Guṇābhirām himself died just two years later, on the 25th March 1894. Their eldest son Karuṇābhirām died at Madhupur on the 12th July 1893, and the second son Kamalābhirām died on the 30th November 1894, after passing, the Entrance examination. Jñānadābhirām Baruwā, Barrister-at-Law, and a prominent Assamese literateur, the youngest son of this great family, still survives.

His family life, bereavements and widow marriage.

Guṇābhirām studied Assamese literature from his early years. This is proved by a notification of Mādhavadeva's *Nām-Ghoṣā* edited by Guṇābhirām, dated 10th Agrahāyaṇ, Śak 1778 (about 24th November, 1856) while still a student of the Presidency College, Calcutta, as corrected by His Holiness the Āuniyāti Satradhikār, (Vide *Orunodoi*, Vol. XII, no. 7, July 1857). As early as 1858, while returning from Calcutta Guṇābhirām wrote his drama, *Rām-Navamī*, on the boat. No copy of this drama was known save the one said to have been preserved in the India Office Library, London. In my earlier works on the History of Assamese Literature, I therefore depended on what I heard about it. I have since written to his worthy son, Sri Jñānadābhirām Baruwā, Barrister-at-Law, who has kindly given me a right idea about it.

His early literary efforts and editing of the *Nām-Ghoṣā* (1856).

Guṇābhirām's drama *Rām-Navamī*, written in 1858, was apparently his earliest original work. It was a

beautiful tragedy woven about the subject of widow marriage, the burning topic of the day. We have already referred to the zeal of Guṇābhirām Baruwā from his early life for social reforms such as widow marriage and also mentioned the testimonies of his sincerity in this respect informing how he himself married the widow of Paraśurām Baruwā and how he gave his widowed daughter, Svarṇalatā, again in marriage. The widow Marriage Act was passed in 1856 when Guṇābhirām was in Calcutta. He was present not only when the first widow marriage was celebrated in the Sookea Street, Calcutta, but he was also present during two or three such other subsequent marriages. Thus the subject must have been very keenly felt by him.

His *Rām-Navami*, (1858) a tragedy on widow marriage.

The story element of the drama is as follows : Navamī, the heroine, was a widowed girl who, naturally enough, had a secret love affair with a youngman, Rāmcandra, the hero of the drama. As usual, the love was discovered and as usual too in such cases, the hero and the heroine with the members of their families were ostracised by the religious head or Gosāin. The latter however had a dream the night following which he related in the morning to his disciples and all and sundry, as follows :

"Kāli rāti ejan kalākai cuti-cāpar Bāmune, bahut hul thakā ekhan bagā kāpor pindhi āhi mok kale, Herā Gosāin, coānchon bāru mor kāporat kimān hul ! Tumi natunkai ākau etā kiya bindhilā ?"

That is—'Last night one Brahmin who had a dark complexion and short stature, and with a white cloth on, pinned with thorns, came to me and said, ' O Gosāin, look at me and see how thickly my cloth is pinned with thorns ! Why have you then pricked me anew with yet another thorn ?'

This evidently refers to Īśvar Candra Vidyāsāgar, the great advocate of widow marriage whose enthusiasm was mainly responsible for the Widow Marriage Act of

1856. The Gosāin then repents his action. Here the story ends with a concluding poem or song beginning with "Śunibāhā sabhāsada jan: Rām-Navamīr vivaraṇ", and praising the efforts of Īśvar Candra Vidyāsāgar. The Gosāin did not join the chorus and it appears that the orders regarding ostracism stood though the Gosain was repentant. So the drama really advocates widow marriage and appeals for the abolition of this social evil.

Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukānar Jīwan Caritra is the next work of Guṇābhirām which first appeared in 1880, the second edition appearing in 1914 about twenty years after his death. This is the first biographical work of modern type and is almost a model one still. This may fittingly be compared with Boswell's *Life of Johnson* giving a precise and detailed account of the great Ānandarām's life and is at the same time a unique work depicting the history of the times in a most remarkable and accurate manner. Every sentence in this work is replete with facts.

Ānandarām Jiwan Caritra (1880).

The next and no less important work of Guṇābhirām was his *Asam Buranjī*, issued in 1884, just forty years after the publication of Kāśirām and Rādhānāth's *History of Assam*. No one compares the two works, for the earlier work was almost a mere translation of the old Ahom chronicles, while the latter is an original work written on modern and scientific lines. As a matter of fact it is Guṇābhirām's *Asam Buranjī* that has been often referred to by Sir Edward Gait and Mahāmahopādhyāya Padmanāth Bhattacharya in their monumental works.

Asam Buranji (1884).

Asam Bandhu, a monthly literary journal in Assamese was Guṇābhirām's next literary adventure which was first issued in 1885 from Calcutta, some time after Hemcandra's *Assam News* ceased to exist. It was a nice magazine containing

Asam Bandhu (1885-86).

various useful contributions on literature, history, science, industries and such other subjects. Among the most useful contributions that are still remembered are the editor's own illuminating historical article *Asam—Atit āru Bartamān* (Assam—Its Past and Present) continued in several issues; Lambodar Bara's excellent satirical essay "*Sadānandar Kalāghumati*" (Sadananda's Doze); and many exquisite poems of Satyanāth Barā, and so forth. The paper discontinued during the second year after sixteen issues were out. Though comparatively very short-lived, the paper contributed a good deal towards creating a set of new writers among whom were such great writers of the following period as Kamalākānta, Satyanāth, Hemcandra Goswāmi. Guṇābhirām's *Jīwan Caritra* and *Asam Buranjī* were printed at the New Arjya Press, Calcutta, while *Asam Bandhu* was published from 100, Bowbazar Street, Calcutta.

Kaṭhin Śabdar Rahasya Vyākhyā a posthumous work, 1911.

Kaṭhin Śabdar Rahasya Vyākhyā is Guṇābhirām's posthumous work, originally appearing anonymously in the Assamese monthly *Bijulī*. In it he gives humorous interpretations of words which everybody including the person who may be the butt of the joke enjoys. They are original, refreshing, and far from being biting. It was printed in a book form by his worthy son Jñānandābhirām Baruwā in 1911.

Besides these works in print there is a sufficient amount of matter in the pages of the old journals not presented in book form. Among the most valuable of such articles are his *Saumār Bhramaṇ* (Travels in Upper Assam), *Asamat Mānar Sebheā* (The last portion of the misrule of the Burmese in Assam), and *Alikhit Buranji*. (Unwritten History) appearing in such magazines as *Jonākī*. Guṇābhirām wrote some poetic works also. The poems like Ādyā-Śakti-Stotra and *Iśvar Candra Vidyāsāgarar Vaikuṇṭha Prayāṇat Bhārat Bilāp* appearing in *Bijulī* in

1890 under the pseudonym, Gurudatta. Some of his poems have also found place in Padmahās Goswāmi's collection, *Padyamālā*.

Guṇābhirām (later, Rāi Bāhādur Guṇābhirām Baruwā) contributed no little to modern Assamese prose. He had unique style, quite simple and vigorous, an illustration of which may be given from his article Saumār Bhramaṇ :—" Ei Asam deś āmār mātribhūmi. Āmi iyātei upajichon, iyātei sikṣā pāichon. Ei deśar nāmei āmi samsār hātat bikā hai āchon. Jananī jene ādaraṇīya āru pujanīya, ei āmār janmabhūmio āmār pakṣe tene maram āru sewār thalī. Jāk ji bhāl pāi, tāk si barkai śalāge ; sei śalāgibalagiyā bastur jimān ki durbalatā thāok, jimān ki āsoāh thāok, seibor seijane nedekhe. Ene bhāv durbal āru svārthapar haleo e ati manoram. Iyāt prītir ucca ādarśa powā jāi ".

Contribution to modern Assamese prose.

Such a prose style is certainly simpler and more natural than that of Ānandarām, but is of course a bit less powerful than that of Hemcandra. Though Hemcandra was born about two years earlier than Guṇābhirām, the latter was actually earlier in his literary productions and even in death, so that we may say that while Guṇābhirām followed Ānandarām, the two anticipated Hemcandra in whom we really find the culmination of the nineteenth century Assamese literature. We may, of course, say there was a school of writers encircling Guṇābhirām and we have already named some prominent members of this school whom he encouraged as young writers in his journal *Asam Bandhu*. This is then to say that there were really two schools of Assamese writers in the nineteenth century, for Hemcandra also must have had his own circle of admirers even though it may then have been fewer in number.

Guṇābhirām's place in modern Assamese literature.

Like the Vaiṣṇava wr'ters who used to style Caitanyadeva as the Moon and Śaṅkaradeva as the Sun, we may also say

that the firmanent of the nineteenth century Assamese literature was illumined by Guṇābhirām the Moon and Hemcandra the Sun, which comparison also reveals their personal character. We have already mentioned the Shavian ways of Hemcandra and his high personality, so difficult to approach. Rāi Bāhādur Guṇabhirām Baruwā on the other hand, was extremely amiable, accommodating and obliging. His mild nature led to relaxation of Assamese orthography in different writers of his *Asam Bandhu*. Hemcandra, hard and stiff and unsparing as he was, reformed the earlier system of orthography with an iron hand and founded it on rock for us.

Guṇābhirām and Hemcandra.

Like modern prose, modern poetry too had in this period its rise that was slow but sure. Like modern prose, modern poetry was begun by the Christian missionaries, American or native. Just two instances of such religious poetry, could be cited : one M. R. B. or anonymous writer, perhaps from the pen of an American and the other from the pen of a native Christian. The former appeared in the *Orunodoi* (Vol. XII, no. 6, June 1857) as *Saru Semuel*.

We have already described Nidhi Levi Farwell, the first native convert to Christianity as one of the trio of the great Christian literateurs, Brown-Bronson-Farwell, and his valuable contributions to Assamese prose. Several of his poems appeared in the *Orunodoi*, those deserving special mention being "Vinay Vacan", "Svaragar Vivaraṇ", "Narakar Vivaraṇ", "Prabhu Jisu Kriṣtar Avaṭār", "Nistārar Upāi", etc.

In the two examples of Christian poetry by a native and a non-native we find almost a world of difference in the presentation of ideas. The poem *Saru Semuel* perhaps by an American, though written in Assamese, appears still foreign to the ears both in style and thought; but in the

The foreign element in the Christian literature.

other poem by Nidhi Levi, a native Christian, one would feel at home both in matter and manner, only if the word Jesu would be substituted by 'Kṛṣṇa'.

Modern secular poetry in the *Orunodoi* (1846-80).

Besides this religious or Christian poetry, there was a mass of secular poetry appearing in several issues of the *Orunodoi*. A few of such poems, re-printed in *Kāvya Pratibhā*, a comprehensive and representative anthology of modern Assamese poetry (1830-1930) by this writer, (first edition, 1935) may be mentioned. 'Kalikatār Sukhiāti' (Reputation of Calcutta) in Vol. VI, no. 5 (March, 1851) by Kinārām Satriā; 'Chāpā Khānār Vivaraṇ'. (Description of the Printing Press) in Vol. VIII, no. 2 (February, 1853), by Dayārām Cetiyā; 'Guwāhātir Vivaraṇ' (Description of Gauhati) in Vol. VIII no. 6 (June, 1853) by Dharmakānta Burhāgohāin of Gauhati, a descendent of Pūrṇānanda Burhāgohāin, Prime minister of some late Ahom kings; 'Nagāon Jilār Varṇanā' (Description of the Nowgong Town) in Vol. XII, no. 10, (October, 1857). These descriptions are given in a matter-of-fact way and have no particular poetic charm about them. But a departure of Assamese writers from the domain of religion to that of the mudane world is worthy of note.

Beyond the Christian literature and outside the *Orunodoi* circle.

Viśveśvar Vaidyādhipa.

Beyond the pale of this Christian literature and outside the *Orunodoi* circle, a sufficient number of writers must have cultivated Assamese poetry independently, during this period. A few of such writers may be mentioned, and one of the earliest of them must have been Viśveśvar Vaidyādhipa whose interesting work *Belimārar Buranji* has been recovered and published of late by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, for this is a chronicle of Assam in verse giving the events from 1788 to 1819. Perhaps the work was

composed under the patronage of King Purander Siṅha (1832-38) though there is no definite name given.

Viśveśvar still follows the Vaiṣṇavite method and diction in writing his *History* and besides using the usual metres as Pad, Dulari, Chabi, Lecāri etc. he employs two rather new metres. One is the metre named Muktāwali, describing the lament of the wives of Pūrṇānanda Burhāgohāin :

A new Muktāwali metre employed to describe the lament of the widowed wives of Pūrṇananda Burhāgohāin.

Hā Hari Hari Svāmi gaila mari ;
Āilon rājya eri pāilon Kāmapuri e
Dhan jan bāri sakalo taite thākilā.
Tomār samān mantri nāhi ān
Śatru sthāne sthāne karilā nirjyān e
Akaṇṭakā kari samaste bhūmi pālilā.
Tomār biyoge bancileka bhoge
Daivar saṁjoge pāilā mahā roge e
Bipatti kālat āpuni tumi marilā.
Bidhi birambile Māneo khedile
Juddhato hārile bale nowārile e
Āmār kapāle Bidhātā hena lekhilā.

The other metre is named Bidagdha Lecāri which has been employed to describe the lament of the city women on the disaster of king Candrakānta Siṅha. A few verses may be quoted :

Another new Bidagdha Lecāri metre employed to describe lament of the city women for king Candrakānta Siṅha.

Jetikṣaṇe nareśwar olāi āila abhyantar,
Purabāsī yata nārī āche kī Rām Rām :
Āul jāul kari keś yen bātular beś
Urmi kari kāndilanta pāche ki Rām Rām
Hā hā prabhu nareśwar kaika jāhā ekeśvar
Āmāsāk kariā anāth ki Rām Rām.
Ehi buli geri pāri kānde save nar nārī
Mahāśoke dhakuranta māth ki Rām Rām.
Hā hā devī Rājmāw kene jāibā bhūmi pāw
Caturdole calichilā āge ki Rām Rām.
Hānthiba napāva bhūmi kimate calibā tumi
Henase mililā karmabhāge ki Rām Rām.

Viśveśvar thus shows sufficient command over the poetic language, style, diction and metre. By his use of the poetic art to describe a secular subject as History in the Vaiṣṇavite style, he rather bridges the channel that divides the old from the new.

Viśveśvar setting a bridge between the old and the new.

Dutirām Hazārikā's *Kali-Bhārat Buranji* is another fitting companion to Viśveśvar's work. Born at Jorhat in 1806, Dutirām was a pride of the Baniyā community as a whole, and died in 1901. His *Kali Bhārat* (1862) is a chronicle of Assam from 1679 to 1858 in verse. The manuscript which was discovered and published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, appears to have been revised in 1862 and rewritten in 1873. Like Viśveśvar, Dutirām was also a poet of considerable parts. Dutirām, who is known to have been a goldsmith of King Purandar Siṅha, is said to have been informed of all the incidents in this poem by Prince Kāmeśwar Siṅha under royal orders to write this *History* in verse. He also uses many new (English) words in his composition.

Poet Dutirām Hāzarikā (1806-1901) and his *Kali Bhārat Buranji* (1862) in verse.

Kalī Bhārat Buranji is a unique work of great poetic worth. It also shows a Vaiṣṇavite outlook on life and depicts the ephemeral world as such. The following is a poem in the Jumuri metre describing the tragic scene of king Candrakānta Siṅha being taken to Tarātali on foot for execution.

Dutirām's description of King Candra-Kānta Siṅha's reverses.

Candrakānta Mahārajā : Candrara samān tejā.
Nām Candrakānta kay : candra yen prakāśay.
Karilā angak khun : tabhu śānta nohe man.
Nagarar bāj kari : laiyā jāi dute dhari.
Nāhi eko rath yān : meghe kare bariṣaṇ.
Nāhi daṇḍa chatra tāta : māthe ek jāpi mātra.
Pantha panka āche hui : bhūmi gati cali jāi.
Dicai Bhogdai pār hay : lok save āche cāi.

Prajā save berhi yāi : kato hiyā dhākurāi.
Citrar putali yena : hena rājā bhaila kena.
Sāmānyar kon lekhā : Hari pāwe karā āśā.
Guciba durgati dukh : nijānanda pāiba sukh.

Dinanath and his literary works in the Vaiṣṇavite style.

Dīnanāth Bezbaruwā (1813-95) was the son of Kṛṣṇarām Bezbaruwā. He lost his mother in his fourth and father in his nineteenth year. He then became a physician to king Purandar Sinha. When the charge of the whole of the kingdom was taken over by the East India Company, Dīnanāth was first appointed a Mahafej and then a Dewani Sheristadar. He was appointed a Munsif in 1861 at Nowgong, whence later he was transferred to Barpeta, Tezpur, North Lakhimpur and finally to Gauhati whence he retired in 1873. His death took place on the 27th May, 1895. Besides writing his *Bezbaruwar Vamśāwalī* (1844) he wrote one *Guru Caritra* on the life of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, and also rendered Utkal Khanda of the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Ācārya Samhati* of Hara Gaurī Sambād, found in Rudra Yāmal, into Assamese verses of the Vaiṣṇavite style, but they are mostly unpublished. His literary zeal was inherited by his son Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā.

Raghudew Goswami's *Hitopadesa kāvya* (1880-86) in the Vaiṣṇāvite manner.

Raghudeva Goswamī, the late Satrādhikār of Jakhalābandhā, Kaliyābar, Nowgong, is the author of one *Hitopadeś Kāvya*, rendered from the Sanskrit into Assamese verse of Vaiṣṇavite style and diction, about 1880-86 as can be inferred from the following autobiographical verses :

Mahādi dīpak tāte kariyā śakat :
Vindu gaj diyā pāche kariyā jugut.
Mithun māsar yānā, Rohiṇik pāi :
Samāpati bhaila śāstra pad samudāi.
Jakhalā bandhār Satra Kaliyābarat :
Āmār janam jānā sei je satrat...

His verses follow the Vaiṣṇavite manner as may be illustrated by the following quotation :

Magadh deśar rājā ati manohar :
Bala virjye parākrame nāhi samasar.

Putra eka āche tār dvitīya bhaskar :
Vikrame atul sito rajār kumār.

Mrigayā kārjyat sito param nipuṇ :
Mrigayā karante man majil tekhan.

Eka dinā prabhātate rājār kumār :
Mrigayā karita gailā vanar bhitar.

Gopinath Cakravarti's *Kalanka Bhanjan*

Gopīnātha Cakravarti is another writer whose poetical work *Kalaṅka Bhañjan* belongs to this period. He writes in a lower Assam dialect. Though following the Vaiṣṇavite style, his composition and thought are both crude. A few verses may serve as illustration :

Krisṇar caraṇe dhari, bole Rādhā Vrajeśvarī,
Śunā he Murulidhāri, mor manadukh :
Gāont jigilā āche giri, sakale bole bāduā tirī
Ei duhkhe ulyābā naro mukh.
Yadi furibā jāon kāro bāri, āhil setu bar gurikhār tiri
Sakale bole hāo chao āi bāi.

Here and there, may be seen some better performance :

He Hari dayār sāgar sei caranat bhaji āmār
Gokulot nāu hal kalankini :
Amrit khāi hal rog, titā lāge gopāl-bhog
Juir dare hal śilar pānī.
Garhure heti sakhi kari, sāpor bhayat maru dauri
Gayāt piṇḍa dān kari narakat pitā :
Grah jāgor ei guṇ diguṇ hal grah baiguṇ
Eta duhkha mor bhāle lekhichil Vidhātā.
Hari bhaji adhogati, dān kolli hawe durgati
Ghiu khāi nar howe andha :
Fāsit mari svargabās, Kāśit mari narakot bās.
Kato dekhā nāi Dīnabandhu.

Lalit Candra Goswāmī (1845-1900), late Satrādhikār of Narayanpur, Nalbari, rendered Gopal Bhaṭṭa's Sanskrit work into Assamese verse as *Keli Rahasya* in the Vaiṣṇavite style, and the work is complete in 194 verses. It is not devoid of a poetic diction, but generally the style is rather a bit loose :

Lalit Candra Goswāmī (1845-1900) and his verse rendering of *Keli Rahasya*.

Naukāi āsi uthā tumi, asta gailā dinamaṇi,
Meghar garjani atiśay :
Daś diś bhailā mlān, karā Kṛiṣṇa avadhān,
Cikimiki kare tamomay.
Krīrhā erā sandhyā belā śighre āsi naukā melā,
Jamunār kheyā bahudur.
Eta śuni Kṛiṣṇe hāsi sunā Rādhā śaśimukhi,
Naukāi yāita lāge bahudur.
Āru dekhā meghe garje, mūrar upare tarje
Sūrya eve prāi asta bhailā.
Naukākhan āche tīre pracaṇḍa bātāse tāre
Āsfālate bhāngā yena bhailā.

Some of the verses suffer from being rhymed with the same word.

Another writer of this line is Pūrṇakānta Deva Śarmā who rendered *Nal-Caritra* into Assamese verses after the Vaiṣṇavite style in 1889, and wrote many works besides. He was a resident of Dibrugarh. *Hitakathā* (1878) and *Jñānākura* are Pūrṇakānta's contributions in prose. There are other minor writers of this period like Padmahas Goswami of Jakhalabandhā Satra, Nowgong, author of *Śikṣāsār*, who compiled a *Padyamālā* used in schools.

Pūrṇa Kānta's *Nal-Caritra* (1889).

In the field of poetry, we have so far dealt with those writers, who, while they belonged historically to the modern period, still breathed the Vaiṣṇavite or post-Vaiṣṇavite mind and culture. This is why we say that though from 1830 or so Assamese literature enters the British period yet the Modern period had yet to begin.

However, we shall now deal with some Assamese poets of twilight who while they still form a part of this group have sufficiently modern characteristics.

Modern Assamese poets of twilight.

Ramākānta Caudhāri (1846-89) of *Abhimanyu Badh Kāvya* fame was undoubtedly the torch-bearer of this new band of Assamese poets. Ramākānta was the son of Lakṣmīkānta Caudhāri who collected Government revenues from the circles of Khata and Batāhgilā. After passing the Entrance examination, he entered the head-quarters office of the Deputy Commissioner, Gauhati, as an Assistant and was thence transferred to Góalpara, Dhubri and such other places. He returned to the Gauhati court again as a Sheristadar but died in harness about January, 1889.

Ramākānta Caudhāri (1846-89).

Ramākānta, an intelligent and gifted youth, followed Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who introduced the blank verse in Bengali. He first attempted to write his *Abhimanyu Badh Kāvya* in blank verse which was issued as early as 1875, and was of course successful. We quote some lines from the first chapter of this work:

Ramākānta's *Abhimanyu Badh kāvya* (1875) in blank verse.

Daś din yuddha kari Bhiṣma mahābalī
Jetiyā śuilā bīre śar āsanat,
Mahārathi Pāṇḍaveo ānanda manere
Bajāilā dhāk dhol śingā kara-tāl
Jaga jhampa bherī ḍabā āpuni Śri Hari
Nij bādya śankha lai fuāi vijay
Ghor nāde buruāi sakal sabad
Haraṣilā Pāndavak, Sāgar samān
Apār Kauravi sainya purilā sabade.
Hānhākār raṇa thali svāmi nidhanat.
Uthaliā sabda sindhu senār bhitar
Larālā pātāl svarga, larālā medinī
Merudaṇḍa samanvite. Sabade sabade
Bhāngiyā parilā yen ḍharāt ākāś ;

Kampilā Vāsukī trāse ; kāṇe lāge tāli.
Sthalacare jalacare jiwa jantu yata,
Karṇabhedi hiabhedi sabadat sito.
yen eśa vajrapāte camaki uṭhilā.

This is an excellent blank verse with ideas overflowing each line of fourteen letters, and having a poetic diction and force befitting a good poet of his age. He is also the author of an early mythological drama, *Sitā Haraṇ*. Ramākānta shows his mark in both the works.

Baladeva Mahanta (1850-95) is a pioneer of modern Assamese poetry in another line. It is in the short poems, mostly didactic of course, that he makes a mark and shows his originality. His poems were long the model for subsequent writers in such poems. We quote a few verses from a simple poem *Kāuri āru Śiyāl* (The Crow and the Jackal) which displays much originality in simple poetic expressions :

Baladeva Mahanta (1850-95) another poet of modern forms of poetry.

Ekhuturā māṁsa lai param hariṣ hai
Kāk āhi paril dālat :
Khāba ki lukāi thaba, thale konobāi niba,
Ghor cintā lāgil manat.
Mangah thotere dhari cāri fāle dṛṣti kari
Vāyāse bhābile sadupāi :
Alap etiyā khāon alap lukāi thaon
Saj bastu nimile sadāi.
Dūradarsī loke kay, yite sānci rākhi khāi,
Tār kaṣṭa nahay hathāte :
Bagaliye yiti pāi māch tatālike khāi,
Nāpālei thāke śudā pete.
Yata pāi tata khāi alapo sancit nāi
Ei karma daridra lakṣaṇ :
Gṛhīye ji drabya pāi, kichu sānce kichu khāi,
Tene rīti ati bicakṣaṇ.
Sacintit āche kāk, enete śiāl ek
Sei gāch tale upasthit :
Oparalai cāi dekhe māṁsa lai kāke mukhe

Bhābe kārjya ki karā ucit...
Āśātei bandī hai thākile iyāte rai
Jñātiye bā nindā kare pāche:
Āśā yene upakārī nakari kenekai pāri,
Āśātei samsār caliche.
Mahā mahā rājā yata āśār nidāne kata
Karichil kārjya sumahat:
Sisavak mane kari buddhi bal anusari
Calibai lāgiba satat.
Amritar āśā kari bahu puruṣārtha dhari
Sāgar mathile dewāsure:
Strī-ratnar pratyāśāi kaṣṭe bhrami nānā thāi
Trilok jinile Lankesvare.
Abhīṣṭā siddhir hetu samudrat bāndhi setu
Mahārāj Daśarath-sut:
Bhāluk bāndar lai Lankāt prabiṣṭa hai
Yuddha karichil adabhut......
Prithivī habare parā sava lok āśā karā
Barābar āche pracalit :
Śubhāśubh kārjyacai āśār nidāne hāy,
Jatna hale nahay bancit.
Ei kathā bhābi thāki bāyasalai cāi dāki
Kabalai dharile dhūrtarāj:
"Ahe pakṣi, taju rūp dekhibalai aparūp
Saru-bar yata pakshi-māj.
Nava ghana durvādal śyāmapatra śatadal
Sivarṇa nahay taju sam:
Ene kṛṣṇa varṇa hāi āmi kato dekhā nāi
Dehāro gathan nirupam......
Mai ati murhamati, nājāno minati stuti
Nowāron varṇāba tayu guṇ:
Taju sumadhur svar śuni heno manuṣyar
Param santuṣṭa hay man.
Nānā sthāne asamkhyāt, pakshīr śunichon māt
Manuṣyaro gīt achon śuni:
Janamei hal brithā nuśunilon tayu kathā
Karā pakshi ek bār dhvani."......

Here though the theme is so simple, yet the language has a majesty approaching almost the classical style

of the Vaiṣṇavite writers. Unfortunately Baladeva's contribution to poetry is not so vast in quantity, but there are few educated Assamese of the present times who have not got at least a few lines of his poems by heart. He was a descendant of Bhavānanda Sāud *aliās* Nārāyana Ātā, one of the greatest disciples of Śaṅkardeva at Barpeta; but Baladeva's forefathers migrated thence to Khagarijan (present Nowgong) and his father settled at Māyāmāri Elengi Satra, four miles off from the Nowgong town, and here he met Naranāth Mahanta, a well-known prose writer of his time, and studied literature. He left his only daughter who in turn leaves a daughter. Baladeva's only contribution to Assamese poetry is his *Ujupāṭh*, issued in 1884. His prose works are varied and include school books as *Jarip*, *Parīmiti*, *Pāṭigaṇit*, *Saralakṣetra Geometry*, *Kārjya Paricaya* and so forth.

Bholānāth Dās (1858-1929).

Bholānāth Dās was born in July 1858, at Nowgong, to his father Bāpīrām and mother Padmāwatī of the Bakhar Barā family well-known in the place, as their only son. In 1879 Bholānāth passed the Entrance examination and got himself admitted to the Metropolitan College. But soon after he had to return home for his mother's serious illness, and was appointed a District Surveyor of Nowgong. This job did not suit him, and he preferred to be the last master of the Nowgong High School, from which post he in turn became an education clerk, and then a survey teacher of Nowgong and Sibsagar. Then, he was posted to the Subordinate Civil Service and became a Sub-Deputy Collector in 1888. Gradually he became a first class officer and a second class Magistrate and Assistant Settlement Officer. He performed the re-Survey and re-Settlement work of Gauhati, and then retired on the 12th December 1912. Even after this he was engaged in other public activities till 1927. He died on the 2nd July 1929, at his own residence at Gauhati from a stroke of apoplexy.

Bholanath as the morning star of modern Assamese poetry.

Bholānāth may aptly be styled the morning star of Modern Assamese poetry. In 1882-83 he published his *Kavitā Mālā* (volumes I and II). These poems saw the light of day earlier in the *Assam Bandhu* magazine and earned sufficient fame for the poet of the new age. In 1884 were issued his *Cintā-Taraṅgiṇī* (parts I and II). His *Sītā Haraṇ Kāvya*, written in Assamese blank verse in imitation of the Bengali poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, appeared in parts earlier in the periodical *Asam Bilāsinī* (1871-83) and was issued independently in 1888. This latter work created a sensation, for it was a servile imitation of Madhusudan Dutt in an Anglo-Benglo-Assamese style, for such lines as "Kon siti basi chair āsane hastere likhani chalāi jāi" etc. show a curious combination of the three languages Assamese, Bengali and English; but all the same his poetic talent and power remain indisputable.

In spite of his defects, Bholānāth may be called the father of short poems in modern literature, as opposed to longer poems or epics of earlier Assamese literature. Such poems of Bholānāth like "Kiayāno nājāge āmār man" (Why do not our minds awake?) and "Megh" (The cloud) bring out the message of the new age. As regards what we have called his Anglo-Benglo-Assamese style, he used it under the notion, wrong as it was, that a language so simple as Assamese would perhaps not be suitable for serious poetry such as epics; and his early education in the heyday of Bengali in Assam induced him to write in such an artificial style. Though his great predecessor Ramākānta also imitated Michael Madhusudana's blank verse more than six years before him, he had a perfect assimilation of the influence, which Bholānāth had not. Thus we must call Ramākānta a better writer of blank verse; but for this reason alone he cannot claim to be the herald of the new age, for these mythological epics in Assamese were still some-

thing of the mediæval world and though the Assamese blank verse was a modern thing it could be used at any time. Like his style, Bholānāth's fame as a poet was something mixed. He is now dead and gone and so his defects are interred with his bones. But his merits are here, and we still cherish his memory as a pioneer of modern Assamese poetry.

Rise of the modern drama—social, tragic, farcical and mythological.

The rise of modern drama is another important feature of this period. We have already referred to Hemcandra's serio-comedy *Kanyār Kirttan* though, stricty speaking it is not a drama, and to Guṇābhirām's social tragedy, *Rām-Navamī*. Besides these there was one Kefāyāt-ullāh who is said to have written a farce during this period. We could not ascertain the exact date of one Rudrarām Bardalai of Nowgong who wrote one *Baṅgāl Baṅgālanī Nāṭak*, and of one Devanātha Bardalai of the same place who issued two dramas *Hema-Prabhā* and *Vaidehī-Biccheda* about this time. Ratnadhar Baruwā (1864-94), Ghanaśyām Baruwā (1867-1923), Ramākānta Barkākati (1860-1935) and Gunjānan Baruwā (1860-1936) jointly rendered Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* into an Assamese drama as *Bhrama-Ranga* in a national setting and issued it in 1888. We have also referred to Ramākānta Caudhāri's (1846-89) mythological drama *Sitā Haraṇ* which must have been issued about this time. Rajanīkānta Bardalai, Kanaklāl Baruwā and Gopāl Kṛiṣṇa De are also known to have written one mythological drama each about this time, but now they cannot be traced.

Growth of the Assamese novel: *Sudharmār Upākhyāna* (1884).

Like the drama, the novel, a gift of the English literature, had its inception during this period. The only novel, worth the name and published before the nineties of the nineteenth century was *Sudharmār Upākhyāna* issued as early as 1884 by Padmāwati Phukanani (1853-1927), the eldest child and only daughter of Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan. She

was given in marriage to one Nandīśvara Phukan of Jorhat, and after losing four sons and two daughters and then her husband, she returned to Gauhati where she died. This is an interesting domestic novel in the manner of Jane Austen. Padmāwatī also published, one school book *Hita-Sādhikā*, and wrote many articles in local newspapers till the first quarter of the present century. Guṇābhirām's wife, Viṣṇupriyā also issued one *Nīti-Kathā* in 1884 and their daughter Svarṇalatā published one prose work *Ārhi-Tirotā* (Model Woman).

Progress of Journalism in Assam.

The most important and wide-spread literature of this period was that of journalism. We have already referred to some of the journals in general, but we shall here describe them chronologically. We have already referred to Sir E. A. Gait's work, *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*, Appendix IV giving "A Short Account of the Rise and Progress of Journalism in the Assam Valley." Rāi Sāhib Benudhar Rajkhowa also issued a pamphlet in English on this subject.

" The *Orunodoi*, a monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general intelligence, is printed and published at Sibsagar Mission Press, by O. T. Cutter, for the American Baptist Mission in Assam." This was the description printed when the paper was first started in January, 1846. Cutter perhaps remained the editor till 1850 or Vol. V, and in 1851 Brown became the editor from Vol. VI and Cutter left Sibsagar in 1853. This year, from Vol. VII, A. H. Danforth becomes the editor, and in 1855 Brown left Sibsagar. From Vol XI, 1856, S. M. Whiting becomes the editor. Then the following missionaries became its editors in order Bronson from 1865; Dr. and Mrs. Ward from 1867; Clarke from 1869; Rev. Gorney from 1874; Rev. and Mrs. Witter from 1884 (?). We are not sure whether *Orunodoi* continued till 1884; but it seems to have continued till 1882, while Mrs. S. R. Ward wrote that it was

discontinued in 1880. We have already said much about the tremendous influence of this paper. It was illustrated from the *Illustrated London News* with blocks made by Assamese carpenters. It was priced Rupee one per annum.

It was an inspiring ideal indeed, and it gave impetus to the birth of a galaxy of newspapers and magazines in Assam, both in English and Assamese. *Asam Bilāsinī* (1871-83) is the second Assamese monthly journal published from the Āuniāti Dharma Prakāś Press. It was mainly a religious organ of the Satra, but it also gave news and ventilated public opinion. *Asam Mihir* (1872-73) is the third Assamese journal, and the first weekly in Assam published by the Gauhati Cidānanda Press. *Asam Darpaṇ* (1874-75) was the next monthly in Assamese published from Viśwanāth in Tezpur and edited by Lakṣmi Kānta Barkākati. In the years 1875 and 1876 two other journals, one religious and the other literary and scientific, made their appearance. Both these papers were edited from Nowgong, Assam, and printed in Calcutta. The year 1876 saw another religious monthly organ published by the Nowgong Dihingiya Gosāin from the Dharma Prakāś Press at Gauhati. Other journals are *Goālpārā Hitsādhinī* (1876-78), a weekly, and *Candroday* and *Asam Dīpak* two monthly papers published by the Cidānanda Press and Dharma Prakās Press respectively from Gauhati.

An *Anglo-Assamese Weekly* was edited by the late Hemcandra Baruwā and published from the Baruwā Phukan Brothers and Co., by late Māṇik Candra Baruwa and Annadārām Dhekiāl Phukan, son of the late Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan. It had a brilliant success and immense influence, and had about nine hundred subscribers. It was however discontinued in the very year in which *Asam Bandhu* (1881-82) made its appearance being edited by late Guṇābhirām Baruwā. It was succeeded by the publication of *Mau* edited by Harināràyaṇ Baruwā in December 1886, and *Asam*

Tarā (1888-90) edited by Śrīdhar Baruwā of Āuniāti Satra being published from Calcutta and Gauhati respectively. *Larā Bandhu* (1888), the first Assamese children's magazine edited by Karuṇābhirām, son of Guṇābhirām Baruwā, and published from Nowgong, also belongs to this period.

Efforts to preserve old manuscripts.

New efforts to preserve the old manuscripts is another important feature of this period. It was a sympathetic movement started by the efforts of the American Baptist Mission. The first efforts were those of Rev. Nathan Brown himself. He collected as many as forty manuscripts till 1850, among which are included the *History* edited by Kāśīnāth and Rādhānāth in 1844 and published by the Baptists, and the *Cutiyā Chronicles* issued in the *Orunodoi*. Then, followed a period of more than sixty years during which no fresh efforts were seen, until Sir Archdale Earle's regime.

It was Colonel P. R. T. Gurdon who employed Hemcandra Goswāmī in the Subordinate Civil Service. Hemcandra now collected as many as 77 Sanskrit and 156 Assamese manuscripts which latter included works on diverse topics as the following: (1) Proverbs 4, (2) Arithmetic 4, (3) Astronomy 1, (4) Biographies 12, (5) Chronicles 10, (6) Dramas 14, (7) Poetry 39, (8) Story 1, (9) Ahom dictionary 1, (10) Incantation and charms 1, (11) Medical treatise 2, (12) Miscellanies 2, (13) Mythologies 16, (14) Religious works 34, (15) Riddles 1, (16) Songs 4, (17) Tantra 1, giving the total of 156. It is needless to say that Brown did not perhaps care to collect religious manuscripts for reasons best known to all. Besides, the public would not easily allow its religious works to be handled by any one and every one far from allowing them to be printed lest their sanctity would be spoiled and the dignity of the great Vaiṣṇavite writers slighted.

Haribilās Āgarwālā, (1842-1916), the pioneer publisher of old Assamese classics.

Haribilās Āgarwālā (1842-1916) was the pioneer in non-official circles to serve the literature by issuing the old religious works. A Mārwārī by tradition, his parents settled in Assam and married here. Haribilās, born in 1842 at Gamiri in Tezpur, was given the best education that was possible at Dibrugarh and Sibsagar, and was later admitted to the Hindu School in Calcutta. Though he discontinued his academic life soon after, he travelled widely in all sacred places of India, Burma and Ceylon. He was a business magnet and had business on a large scale in Assam and in Calcutta where he had his own residence in the Armenian Street near Baubazar. He had five sons among whom was Candrakumār, the high-priest of romanticism in Assamese literature. Haribilās himself had some literary gifts and wrote a short life of Lambodar Barā and read it at a sitting of the Assamese Language Improving Society. He had business of saw-mills, lac, elephant trapping and tea-plantation, the last of which has its monument at Tāmolbāri, a pioneer tea-estate of native planters. He died on the 18th November, 1916.

As early as 1876, Haribilās published the *Kirttan-Ghoṣā*, and then published the Tenth, Eleventh, and then the First, Second and Third Books of the *Bhāgavata* by Śaṅkaradeva. He also published Śaṅkaradeva's *Guṇa-mālā*, *Sītā Svayambar Nāt*, *Bhatimā*, *Bargīt* etc. before the close of the nineteenth century. He also published Puruṣottamā Thākur's *Prayoga Ratnamālā Vyākaraṇa* in Sanskrit composed under king Nara Nārāyaṇ. He also issued Mādhavadeva's *Ratnāwalī*. Daityāri Thākur's *Guru Caritra* and other works such as *Ripunjay Smṛti*, from the press, as also the Assamese version of *Sār Nitya Kriyā* by Svāmī Śiva Nārāyāṇ Paramhaṁsa. It is with pecuniary help of Haribilās that Rāi Bāhādur Guṇābhirām Baruwā

published his *Kāvya Kusumā*, selection of old Assamese poems. Thus Haribilās must be remembered at least as a great patron of Assamese literature.

Mādhava Candra Bardalai (1846-1907), another patron of Assamese literature like Haribilās, was born in January, 1846, at North Gauhati. He passed his Entrance examination in 1864 with other great sons of Assam as Ānandarām Baruwā, Colonel Jālnur Āhmed and Colonel Śivarām Barā. He passed his First Arts course duly, but having failed in the first attempt at his B. A. examination, he was reduced to the necessity of serving as a clerk at Nowgong and then at the Gauhati Steamer office. He then left his last job for a teachership in the Barisal High School and served there for three years. Thence he passed the Licentiate of Law examination and joined the Gauhati Bar. He was soon recruited from it to be an Extra-Assistant Commissioner whence he happened to top the list of Deputy Magistrates. He served for 27 years in the Provincial Civil Service, but died on the 10th October, 1907.

Mādhaw Candra Bardalai (1846-1907).

Mādhava Candra's fame rests on his first publication of the Seven Cantos of the Assamese *Rāmāyaṇa* by Mādhava Kandalī, Śaṅkardeva and Mādhavadeva. His learned preface to this work proves his scholarship in Assamese. He also issued Puruṣottam Gajapati's interesting work, *Dīpikā Candra*, from the Sanātan Dharma Press of Barpeta in 1895. He was intent on establishing a printing press of his own, but he found no time to materialise his hope.

His publication of the seven cantos of Assamese *Rāmāyana* and other works.

Lakṣeśwar Śarmā was another young man who dedicated his life to the propagation of old Assamese literature, and actually prepared to publish the whole of the Assamese *Mahābhārata*, but unfortunately this attempt was also nipped in the bud as he died a very early death ; and

the publication of the work remains incomplete till this day.

Institutional efforts is also another feature of this period. A notice in the *Orunodoi* (Vol. XIII), in 1858, shows the existence of one Asam Deś Hitaiṣiṇī Sabhā. It transpired that one Priyalāl Baruwā and others established it on the 24th Agrahāyaṇ, 1777 Śak with the avowed purpose of promoting the welfare of the modern Assamese language and literature. Again, on the 25th August, 1888, at 37, Mirjapur Street, was held the first sitting of the Assamese Language Improving Society, among the Assamese students of Calcutta. They chalked out a programme of their work as follows: 'It shall be the endeavour of this Society to invite attention of the authorities of the Education Department of Assam to see that Assamese is actually employed in all grades of schools in Assam and that Assamese children have all facilities to study their own mother-tongue; to remove all grammatical and orthographical anomalies and to use correct forms of speech instead; to move the authorities to use suitable works removing the defective ones; to remove the wants of our language by translating from Sanskrit or other languages; ...to promote interest for newspapers; and to create a standard language all through Assam". (*Jonāki*, Vol. I, no. 9, p. 211; *Asam Tarā*, no. 8, Bahāg). That these aims of the then Assamese students in Calcutta were amply fulfilled in the nineties of the nineteenth century and in the following period, we shall presently see. This Society brought out a comprehensive *Catalogue of Assamese Books* in 1890.

Efforts of the Assamese students in Calcutta (1888).

III

B. THE NEW ROMANTIC PERIOD, AND LATER-DAY ASSAMESE LITERATURE (1890-1947)

Like the *Orunodoi*, the monthly paper *Jonāki* marks a new epoch in modern Assamese literature. So the modern period (1826-1947) can be divided into the *Orunodoi* and the *Jonāki* Ages, or the Early Modern and the Late Modern or the Romantic Period, so as to bring into relief the new changes. As we count the Vaiṣṇavite Period from 1450, though Śaṅkaradeva was born in 1449, and as we have marked 1830 as the modern period for Ānandarām Dhekiāl Phukan's birth, though it actually took place in 1829; so as a matter of convenience we may date this Romantic Period from the first year of the nineties, though as a matter of fact the *Jonāki* was issued in the last year of the eighties of the nineteenth century. Besides this, the *Orunodoi* and *Jonāki* Ages have something in common between the two, namely that though either cannot claim any comparison with the great glorious Vaiṣṇavite period, still in their own way *Orunodoi* and *Jonāki* practically were the organs of two movements, the former against the usurpation of Bengali, and the latter for proper re-installation of Assamese after years of banishment. The Baptists laid the foundation of modern Assamese language and literature, and even the Early Modern trio, Ānandarām-Hemcandra-Guṇābhirām did little more than consolidate the new foundation; while the Romantics represented by the next great trio, Candrakumār-Lakṣmīnātha-Hemcandra could raise a new building on them.

Jonāki, the leading Assamese monthly of the period, made its first appearance on the 9th February, 1889, and was published from Calcutta by its sole proprietor and editor Candra Kumār Āgarwālā. In the following years it was edited by Hemcandra Goswāmī and Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā respectively. It was discontinued for some time and was

Progress of journalism in Assam up to *Jonaki*.

again published from Gauhati by Kanaklāl Baruwā and Satyanāth Barā. *Bijuli* appeared in 1890 from Calcutta and was successively edited by Kṛiṣṇaprasād Duwarā, Padmanāth Baruwā, Benudhar Rajkhowā and by Lakṣmīnāth Śarmā, when it was published from Shillong. *Assam*, another Anglo-Indian weekly founded by the late Māṇik Candra Baruwā and edited by Kālirām Baruwā appeared in September, 1894. It was followed on the 5th January 1895, by the publication of the *Times of Assam*, an English weekly long surviving. *Assam Banti* is another Anglo-Assamese weekly published in January 1899, from the Assam Central Press by some patriotic persons of Tezpur like Kamalā Kānta Bhattācārya and Jaydeva Śarmā, and first edited by Mathurā Mohan Baruwā, and then by Jaydeva Śarmā. *Eastern Herald* (1902-04) edited by Vasambad Mitra, *Citizen* (1904-06) edited by Kalināth Rāi, *Assam Chronicle* (1905) edited by Kṛiṣṇa Candra Baruwā are other newspapers published from Dibrugarh. *Deepti* (1905-07) was also published by Baptists from Dibrugarh. *Advocate of Assam* (1905-12) also edited by Mathurā Mohan Baruwā from Gauhati, and *Uṣā* (1907) by Padmanāth Baruwā, published from Tezpur, were the other periodicals issued before the second decade of the present century.

Bānhi, Āloconi (1909) and their group of magazines and weeklies.

In Agrahāyaṇ, 1831 Śak (November, 1909) was issued *Bānhi* from Assam Bengal Stores at 2, Lal Bazar Street, Calcutta, edited by Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā, with great promise and long life. It followed the creed of *Jonāki*, for it was the organ of the same school of writers including the editor. It was later published from Dibrugarh and then from Gauhati by Candrakumār Āgarwālā still with Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā as its editor till the middle of the thirties. It then passed into other hands. *Āloconi* (1909-17) was another monthly journal published from Dibrugarh in Kārtika 1831 Śak (October,

1909) with editors as Prasannakumār Baruwā, Durgānāth Cāngkākati, and Nilamaṇi Phukan successively. Other journals were *Asam Bāndhava* (1910-16) edited by Tārānāth Cakravartī from Tezpur, *Kabitā Latā* (1911-13) a quarterly edited by Nīlakaṇṭha Baruwā from North Lakhimpur, *Viśva-Bārttā* (1911) a weekly edited and published by Kālirām Dās from Dacca, *Asam Herald* (1912), a weekly edited by Kṛṣna Candra Baruwā from Nowgong, *Asam Rāyat* (1912) edited by Bholānāth Gohāin from Dibrugarh, *Raṇar Bārtari* (1914) issued for sometime during the first great war, *Akaṇ* (1916) a children's magazine beautifully illustrated and edited by Hemcandra Goswāmi and published by Lohit Candra Bhuyān from 43 Amharst Street, Calcutta, in January 1916.

Asamiyā (1918) and other periodicals.

Asamiyā then made its appearance in 1918, edited and published by Candrakumār Āgarwālā through Assam Printers and Publishers Ltd. as a weekly and had yet a vigorous life now as a daily Assamese national paper. A large number of journals and weeklies then followed. *Prabhāt* (1920), a quarterly from Jorhat Normal School, *Islāmi Akhbār* (1919-20) from Gauhati, *Cetanā* (1919-26) edited and published from Gauhati by Ambikācaraṇ Rāi Caudhuri, *Asam Pradīpikā* (1920) edited by Rajanikānta Bardalai, *Asam-Krish* (1921) edited by Rāi Sāhib Narāyāṇ Baruwā, *Janmabhūmi* (1922) as the first quarterly organ of the Assam Students' Conference by Daiba Candra Tālukdar, Śukdeva Goswāmī and Dimbeswar Neog as joint editors, *Arghā* (February, 1922) a fortnightly journal jointly edited by Siṁhadatta Adhikāri and Padmadhar Calihā; *Milan* (1923-38) the second quarterly organ of the Assam Students' Conference with successive editors in Garga Nārāyaṇ Caudhuri, Dimbeswar Neog, Binandacandra Baruwa and others; *Mainā* (1923) a children's magazine edited by Raghunāth Caudhāri; *Bihār* (1923), an

organ of the Baḍo community of Lower Assam; *Sādhanā* (1924-31), an organ of the Assam Muhammadan Students' Conference edited by Md. Saleh and published from Gauhati.

Asam Hitaiṣī (1925-29) was issued from the Bhudev Publishing House, Calcutta, edited by Kamalākānta Bhattācārya, Mahādeva Śarmā, Durgādhar Barkataki successively. Other journals that followed are *Cotton College Magazine* (1924), *Economic Journal of Assam* (1925), both published from Gauhati; *Ārjya Darpaṇ* (1924) edited by Nigamānanda Svāmī from Kakilāmukh, Jorhat; *Jāgaraṇ* (1924-26) edited by Tapes Candra Bāgaci from Dibrugarh; *Khetiyak* (1925) edited by Rāi Sāhib Nārāyaṇ Candra Baruwā from Nakacāri, Jorhat; *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā* (1925-44) edited successively by Candradhar Baruwā, Devānanda Bharāli, Dimbeswar Neog, and others; *Aruṇ* (1926-32), children's magazine edited by Mahādeva Śarmā. *Prabhātī* (1926) another organ of the Kacāri community of Upper Assam; *Jananī* (1926) edited by Shādir Hussain from North Lakhimpur; *Kārbār āru Kārbāri* (1926) edited by Mahendranāth Bhattācārya from Dibrugarh; *Paśu Pālan* (1926-55), a journal on domestic animals' welfare edited by Kanak Candra Śarmā of Dibrugarh having a tenaciously long life; *Jeuti* (1926-55) a quarterly of the Jorhat Government High School; *Sewā* (1926) two-monthly organ of the Kaibartta community edited by Śukleswar Barā from Gauhati; *Satyabādī* (1926) a fortnightly paper edited by Toṣeśwar Dhekiāl from Dibrugarh; *International Times* (1927) edited by Ṭaruncandra Bhaṭṭācārya from Shillong; *Prāntobāsī* (1927) a weekly edited by Gaurināth Śāstri from Dhubri; *Sāntā Pradīp* (1928) edited by Tīrthanāth Goswāmī from Dhalar Satra, Golaghat; *Pracārak* (1928) edited by Md. Sulaiman Khān as the organ of the Assam Esvayate Islam Society from Dibrugarh.

Asam Hitaisi (1925-29) and other journals.

Ghar Jeuti (1928) the first journal for women in Assam, edited by Mrs. Kamalālayā Kākati and Kanak Latā Calihā ; *Cotton Collegiate School Magazine* (1928) issued from Gauhati ; *Galpa Series* (1929) edited by Bepin Candra Baruwā from Jorhat ; *Bātari* (1929-37) edited first by its proprietor Rāi Bāhādur Śiva Prasād Baruwā and then by Nilamaṇi Phukan, begun as weekly and then conducted as daily in Assamese and issued from Jorhat ; *Āvāhan* (1929-40) edited by Dinanāth Śarmā with Zamindar Nagendra Nārāyaṇ Caudhuri as its patron ; *Nagarar kathā*, *Asam* (July, 1935), and *Svarāj* were issued from Jorhat for some time, the first issued daily, the second on every alternate day and the third as a weekly. *Pratibhā* and *Asam Sevak* were the next two weeklies from Gauhati, *Jayanti* and *Surabhi* were also published from Gauhati, the first as a fortnighly and the second as a monthly paper. *Maṇipur-Matam* is another Maṇipuri-Assamese paper published from Maṇipur.

Gharjeuti (1928) a woman's journal, etc.

Institutional efforts were even more regular in this period. As early as the 2nd July, 1894, in response to Sir Edward Gait's proposal and Sir William Ward's approval of it, the Government of Assam notified its intention to start the work of Assam Ethnography Department as a result of Risley's finds on the subject in regard to the races of Bengal. On the 18th July 1894, Lyal, the officiating Chief Commissioner of Assam, further declared his intention to make a grant for the preservation of old manuscripts of Assamese religious works and chronicles, and accordingly Gait made an allotment of Rs. 500/- for the rest of the financial year, 1894-95, and an annual allotment of Rs. 1000/- for three subsequent years. All the Deputy Commissioners were also instructed to help Gait in this collection. Gait's famous work, *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in*

Efforts of the Assam Ethnography Department (est. 1894).

Assam, referred to so many times, was the ripe fruit of his labours, which was submitted to the Chief Commissioner on the 23rd January, 1897, and was published in the same year. The *Report* included a comprehensive list of published and unpublished Assamese books and books in various languages regarding Assam; they were on different subjects such as geography, geology, archaeology, history, religion, mythology, ethnography, philology, coins and miscellanies. It is difficult to exaggerate its importance.

Gait's work in the Department till 1897.

Gait collected vast and varied materials in this connexion among which were coins of the Āhom, Koc, Jayantiyā, Tripurā, Kācār, Maṇipur and other kings. He also gathered stone inscriptions, copper plates, inscriptions on cannon belonging to the pre-Āhom, Āhom, Koc, and Muhammadan periods. There were also chronicles in the Āhom and Assamese languages, religious works, mythologies, stories and traditions, along with a catalogue of the archaeological remains of the country. Gait was the first Honorary Director of this Department which position he retained till 1897, and then with the materials thus collected he issued his famous *History of Assam* in 1905.

Colonel Gordon as successor in the Assam Ethnography Dept. (1897-1920).

Gait was succeeded by Colonel P. R. T. Gordon in 1897 as the Director of Assam Ethnography Department and he soon undertook the publication of the collected *Assamese Proverbs* and then the editing and publication of *Hemakoṣ*, the first etymological Assamese dictionary that could be issued in 1900, with the help of his subordinate officer Hemcandra Goswāmī. Gordon also started the work of researches in regard to Assamese coins, and of the Māran, Khāmti and such tribes. In 1904, Sir Bamfield Fuller took over the charge of this Department temporarily and began the publication of monographs on

the hill tribes, and Gordon himself wrote an account of the Khāsis. It is under this Department that Hemcandra Goswāmī was deputed to collect *Assamese Manuscripts* to which we have already referred. He edited and published *Asam Buranji*, an old chronicle of Assam, the *Darrang Rāj Vaṁśawalī* by Surjyakhari Daibajña and the *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* are really remarkable achievements.

Dr. Hutton as next successor, and the monographs on the hill tribes of Assam.

In 1920, Col. Gordon was succeeded by Dr. Hutton as the Director of Assam Ethnography Department, and he soon began deeper researches in the matter of the hilltribes of Assam, and such publications as the following do great honour to the unique service rendered by this Department to the study of this subject in general. The publications include: Monographs on the Hill Tribes of Assam: *The Lakshers*, by N. E. Parry; *The Thadou Kukis* by William Shaw; *The Ao Nagas* and *The Lhota Nagas* by J. P. Mills; *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam* by W. C. Smith M. A., Ph. D.; *The Sema Nagas* and *The Angami Nagas* by J. H. Hutton C. I. E., M. A.; *The Cacharis* by Rev. S. Endle; *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, and *History of the Assam Rifles* by Lt. Col. Shakespear; *The Mikirs* by Charles Lyall; *The Metheis* by T. C. Hodsom, *Manuals of the Bengali Language including an Assamese Grammar* (1894) by G. F. Nichol and *Assamese and Bengali* (1896) by J. D. Anderson are works of the period from outside.

Assam Research Society (e. 1912).

The Assam Research Society was established on the 7th April 1912, with Sir Archdale Earle, Maharaj Sir Jitendra Nārāyaṇ Bhūpa Bāhādur of Kochbehar, Liutenant-Colonel P. R. T. Gordon, Sir Edward Gait and Rājā Prabhāt Candra Baruwā Bāhādur of Gauripur as its patrons. This Society has since been doing important

work in its own way that may, not unfittingly, compare with the similar works of Research Societies in other provinces of India. Its members and workers fortunately included such scholars as Mahāmahopādhyāya Padmanāth Bhattācārya Vidyāvinoda M. A., Pandit Hemcandra Goswāmī and Rāi Kanaklāl Baruwā Bāhādur C. I. E. They contributed a great deal to the work of this Society and gave it the status that it now enjoys. The *Journal* of this Society founded by Rāi Bāhādur Kanaklāl Baruwā has published many valuable articles on many dark aspects of the history of Assam.

Assam Students' Conferences.

The Assam Students' Conference held its first sitting at Gauhati on the 25th December 1916, presided over by Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā. It has since had many eminent scholars like Col: Gordon, Dr. Bhandarkar, Sir Prafullacandra Rāi, C. F. Andrews, and Deva Prasād Sarvādhikāri, as its President, and did a lot to promote the welfare of Assamese literature. The various *Sammilan Pravandhāvalis*, the several publications of Hemcandra Baruwā Memorial Series, its journals such as *Janmabhūmī* and *Milan*, already described, its awarding of Ānandarām Baruwā Gold Medal for an original paper on Sanskrit literature, and, above all, its propagation of Assamese hero-worship, served to enthuse the people everywhere. The institution still survives, but its present participation in politics has led it away from its original line of work. The Assam Muhammadan Students' Conference was also established some time later, with its organ *Sādhanā*, already described, and contributed a good deal in its particular way to the improvement of Assamese literature.

The Assam Literary Association met for the first time at Sibsagar on the 26th December 1917, with Rāi

Bāhādur Padmanāth Gohāin Baruwā in the chair. The Association has since been doing much useful work including the publication of a *Journal* and a *Dictionary* in 1933 through the Candrakānta-Indrakānta Trust Fund. It got a great impetus from the pecuniary encouragement of Radhākānta Handiqui (b. November, 1859) in the shape of the Trust Fund in the name of his deceased sons. *Dāmodar Carit*, and *Banamālī Carit* and *Sātvata Tantra* are works published by the Sabhā through its Naradew Trust Fund; but the authenticity and the editing of the first two works by their paid editor were challenged by the Conference and ordered for proscription or correction. Rewards were declared by the Conference for writing novels etc. and prizes were given for them as also for such works as *Rājasthān*, *Nara Nārāyaṇ*, and for many life-sketches of eminent Assamese financed by the Kamalā Devi Trsut Fund of the Sabhā.

Assam Literary Conference (1917).

The Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, was started in June, 1928 as the result of a proposal from Mr. Cunnigham, the then Director of Public Instruction, Assam, moving the Government of Assam, for the establishment of such an institution, finally approved by Mr. Hammond, the then Governor of Assam. Mr. Bentinc, the Commissioner of Assam, was appointed the Provincial Director, and Mr. Mills the Deputy Commissioner of the Kācār district and Professor Surjyakumar Bhuyān became Assistant Directors for the two valleys. Since Mr. Bentinc retired from service, Professor Bhuyān became the Provincial Director; and from 15th July 1929 he has been carrying on the work on distinct lines. The publications of this Department now include *Asam Buranjī* (1228-1826) by Hara Kānta Baruwā; *Kāmrūpar Buranjī*, *Deodhāi Asam Buranjī*, *Asamar*

Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (1928).

Padya Buranjī by Viśveśvar and Dutirām; *Tungkhungiā Buranjī* (1681-1806) by Śrīnāth Barbaruwā; *Kacāri Buranjī*; *Jayantīyā Buranjī*; *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* by Mirza Nathan rendered into English by Dr. M. I. Barā; *Tripurā Buranjī* (1710-15), and *Asam Buranjī* (1848-81) edited by S. K. Dutta. To this list may be added the earlier Government publications such as *Ahom Buranjī* by Rāi Sāhib Golāpcandra Baruwā; *Ghorā-Nidān* edited by Tarinicandra Bhattācārya; *Asam Buranjī* (1228-1833) by Kāśināth and Rādhānāth; and *Kāmaratna Tantra* translated from Sanskrit into old Assamese by some unknown writer.

Candradhar Baruwā Trust Fund, Assam Museum and Pratibhā Devī Lectures.

Along with these may also be counted such earlier efforts as of the Candradhar Baruwā Trust Fund that contributed a great deal to promote the cause of Assamese literature. As early as 1912, the first *History of Assamese Language and Literature* by Devendranāth Bezbaruwā was published as the prize-book of this Trust. *Kāvya Pratibhā*, a comprehensive and representative anthology of modern Assamese poetry (1830-1930), *Ādhunik Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranjī* and *Kathā Pratibhā*, a comprehensive anthology of modern Assamese literature from 1830 to 1940, were other prize-books of this Trust, and prizes of Rs. 250/- each was continuously won by the author, Dimbeswar Neog, out of this Trust Fund. Late Candradhara Baruwā, son of Haladhar Baruwā of Nowgong, who died an educated and promising young man and bachelor of black-water fever while in change at Madhupur, left Rs. 1400/- earmarked to be spent for encouragement of Assamese literature. The establishment of the Assam Museum and of the Pratibhā Devī Lectures in the last years of the thirties of this century have been other similar incentives during this period.

Kamalākānta Bhattācārya (1853-1936), the grand old man of the period, wrote a good deal till his last days. He was born at Na-duwār Silbandha at Tezpur, but originally belonged to Garhehagā at Biśwanāth in the same subdivision. He was attached to various business such as elephant-trapping of Haribilās Āgarwālā. Later he settled at Gauhati and left his second wife, three sons and two daughters to mourn his death. Kamalākānta wrote for more than sixty years, right from the days of the *Orunodoi*, through the ages of *Assam News*, *Asam Bandhu*, *Jonāki*, *Bānhi*, *Asamiyā* till the day of the latest magazines in the thirties of the present century. He is rightly called a Maharṣi, for he undoubtedly had the foresight of a seer. He was a thoughtful writer both in prose and verse, and like Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* and *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, most of the predictions of his early writings in regard to the future of Assamese people were found to have come true in his later days.

Maharṣi Kamalā Kānta Bhattācārya (1853-1936)—an original thinker and writer.

No exact specimen of Kamalākānta's writings is traceable in the *Orunodoi*, but some of his writings in the subsequent journals are still extant. In 1890 was published his collection of poems, *Cintānal* (The Fire of Thoughts), part one. One thing must be borne in mind that Kamalākānta is nothing if he is not a patriot out and out; and he is first a patriot and then a poet or writer. He himself declared that he simply employed the poetic art to give vent to his patriotic feelings that were burning within him. His defects appear when he is not inspired, and they vanish the moment he had that "celestial fire" or the divine wrath.

His *Cintānal* (1890).

We may refer to two typical poems : "Pūrṇimā Rātilaicāi" (Looking at the moon-lit-night), and "Pāharaṇi" (Oblivion). He begins the Pūrṇimā poem—

"Jonāk rātiti, rupahi hānhiti, suwāi jagat, kino bitopan.
Nicuk jagat, nidrār kolāt, kone mantra māti, harile cetan."

This is indeed beautiful. But the poet soon awakes from this mid-summer night's dream; for even then the miseries of his country once more become uppermost in his heart:

His *Purnimār Rātilai Cāi.*

"Pūrṇimār jonti, rupahi hānhiti, eri hāt joron karā palāyan:
Tomār kiraṇ, nakare śobhon, durbhagā Asam pāpar badan."

That is—'Oh charming smile of the full-moon, do fly away. I beseech you with folded hands! your rays do not look well in the face of Assam, so wretched!' Similar thoughts are found in many other poems such as 'Mariśāli'. (The Churchyard), 'Jātīya Gauraw' (National Pride) etc.

The poem 'Pāharaṇi' (Oblivion) was written, as the poet himself records, on seeing an old rock lying in front of the Tezpur court. He begins by saying:

"Koān Pāharaṇi, tomār petat, katano rākhicha buranji sumāi
Cintile ebār, moron puri dei, kata jāti kīrtti khālā gili hāi."

That is—'Tell me, Oh! Oblivion, how many chronicles have you devoured and put inside your abdomen? I die burning within myself when I think how many glories of the nation you have devoured.' Then the poet looked this way and that, and heard a voice in the air which answered his querries:

"Cintār nināde, śunilon e dhvani, bindhile śokar jongāl śele.
Prakṛtiye diā, deśar snehti, tej hai ghankai dhārere bale
Ciṅari kāndiche śunā Brahmaputre śilanidarāt nirale bahi
Bilāpe e nade, jei din dhari Āryar gauraw paril khahi."

That is—'I have heard that voice resounded in my thought, and the sharp point of the spear pierced my heart; and thus it was that the love of my country which is Nature's own gift, began to flow as blood thick and mobile. Hark ye! cries the Brahmaputra sitting over the yonder stones: this great river laments since the days the Aryan civilisation dropped down.' However the glimpse of bright future has not escaped his sight and he waits for the day:

His poem *Pābarani.*

"Janmiba sidinā, śatek Metchini, tuccha pari thakā śilar parā:

Śata Garibaldi, janam labhiba, kariba pohar Bhārat dhāra."

That is—That day comes when hundreds of Mazzini will be born from such neglected and insignificant stones, and hundreds of Garibaldi will be born out of such stones and will illumine once more India and the world.'

The second part of *Cintānal* was issued in 1922 and contains such patriotic poems as 'Khāsiyā Parvatat thiya di manar bhāb' and such poems as 'Bāsantir Biyā' anticipating and giving the original idea of 'Bahāgir Biyā' in Raghunāth Candhāri's *Sādari* much later; for though presented in a book form in the twenties of this century these poems were first published in the eighties and nineties of the nineteenth century in the magazines *Asam Bandhu*, *Jonāki* and others. His *Cintā-Taranga* is another collection of poems that was issued about the thirties of the present century.

The *Cintā Taranga* and his place in literature.

Kamalākānta certainly occupies a unique place in modern Assamese literature both in poetry and prose. Besides a large number of essays that overflooded the local magazines, and his editorials in the *Asam-Hitaiṣī*, he has left several big volumes of prose manuscripts like his *Aṣṭāvakra* and his autobiography. To sum up, Kamalākānta's place in modern Assamese prose and poetry is certainly very high indeed.

Lambodar Barā (1860-92) one of the great masters of modern Assamese prose, was born in 1860 in Thālipukhuriyā village of Gamiri, Helem, in the Tezpur subdivision. He was the son of a poor but honest peasant. He was a writer in the periodical *Asam Bilāsinī*, from the days he was a student of the Middle Vernacular standard. He wrote his school-book, *Larabodha*, after appearing in the B. A. examination, and rendered the Sanskrit drama *Śakuntalā* a year after, when he served as a Headmaster of the Kahimā Middle English High School. He wrote his prose work *Jñānodaya* after passing the B.A. examination and becoming a lawyer. He was a regular contributor to all local magazines like *Jonāki*, *Asam Tāra*, *Assam News*, etc. By early death in 1892 his other works as *Ānandarām Baruwār Jīwancarit*, *Samāj Darpaṇ Nāṭak*, *Iśwarcandra Vidyāsāgarar Jīwan Carit* and *Bhugol Vidyā* were left incomplete and were soon lost.

Lambodar Barā (1860-92).

Lambodar was undoubtedly a great master of modern Assamese prose, next only to the trinity Ānandarām—Hemcandra—Guṇābhirām. Even his school-books show him at his best, both as a great prose writer and a zealous patriot.

In the famous preface to his *Ānandarām Baruwār Jīwan Carita*, he shows Macaulay's style, a thundering and rhetorical Assamese prose, an almost inimitable style in its own way. It begins :

"Jetiyā prāi goteikhan prithivī ajñān āndhārar kalā dhākaniye dhāki thaichil, jetiyā prāi sakalo mānuhe ulanga beśe parvatar gātat bās kari hābir pahu āru gachar fal-mūl khāi jīwan dhāraṇ karichil, tetiyāo ei puṇyabhūmi Bhāratbarṣa jñānar poharere bhotā tarār dare jiliki āchil."

This single sentence may suffice to prove what we have said. As a matter of fact Lambodar is one of the few modern Assamese writers who have studied rhetoric and have attempted to write in a careful and studied style,

His rhetorical style,

This prose was Lambodar's own, and attained a large amount of dignity without being highly Sanskritized. Such prose styles in any language are generally very attractive; but they seem to make room soon for the more practical style. The only junior writer who seems to have attempted to imitate it was Ānandacandra Āgarwālā who through his wife, Pārijāt, is related to Lambodar. We quote a few sentences from Ānandacandra's essay on Kṣamā (Forgiveness):

"Kṣamā svargīya bastu. Kṣamā tejasvisakalar tej, tāpas sakalar Ved, satyāparāyaṇar satya. Kṣamā dayāmay pitār kaṇṭhamālā. Sakalo mānuh prakrita kṣamāśīl howā hale ei saṁsār soṇar halheten; dukh-kuanliye ābari thakā ei prithivīt svargar jeuti parilheten."

We have already hinted at the growth of satire and humour in modern Assamese in the essays of Hemcandra and Guṇābhirām. Hemcandra used severe satire as Swift or Pope; for in his *Bahire Rang: sang bhitare Kowābhāturi* and in his farcical play *Kāniyār Kīrttan*. Guṇābhirām showed mere wit and humour in his work *Kaṭhin Śabdar Rahasya Vyākhyā*, mild and kindly like the humour of Chaucer. Lambodar showed almost a compromise between the two, being less brutal in his caricatures of the contemporary society, but all the same having pointed references to its vices.

Humour and satire in Assamese prose.

Lambodar's essay *Sadānandar Kalāghumati* (Sadananda's Nap), published in the *Asam Bandhu* (Vol. I, no. 1) illustrates this point.

Sadanandar kalāghumati.

"Ketiyābā kāni-tikirār chāt māri dhoṇwāre ghar goteito bharāi dichilon ketiyābā, tikirā eri pāyas, kuhiār, gur gākhir, mālbhog kal, barā cāular pithā ādi kari soād bastu khāi mukh tapālichilon. . . . ketiyābā ketiyābā dhapāt, tāmol, bhāng, hale Brāhmaṇ-sewālaī anā etupi Brandy, abhāwat ducakal cārāir bhajā mangah ādi bibidh dewapujār drabyereo daś indriyar pujā karā haichil; māje māje kalā ghumatire mitratā kari ketiyābā hali, ketiyābā pari, ketiyābā bariśi bāi, ghāmi, kāhī hāṇhi, hāmiyāī samsārar lethālai ekebāre pithi di paramānanda sāgarat bur mārichilon. Āhā kene, sukh, kene ānanda, kene dewadurlabh

jiwan! Āhā! kene ghumāti, kene sukhar kalāghumati! Jāk dewattāyo nāpāi; kintu Bidhatār barat, kānir guṇat, Asamiyār hale ghare ghare. Ji ei. sukhar parā banchit haiche si garbhate namaril kiya?"

Satyanāth Barā (1860-1925), another master of modern Assamese prose.

Satyanāth Barā (1860-1925), another master of modern Assamese prose, was born at Bharalumukh, Gauhati, in the me year as Lambodar, and originally belonged the Herāpowā village of Naduwār in the same subdivision. Satyanāth lost his father Dayānāth and his mother Amayā in his seventh and ninth year respectively. He attended the school at Gauhati and the college in Calcutta with the pecuniary help of his uncle. Later he served as the Headmaster of the Faridpur Hindu Academy. He died on the 13th of December 1925.,

Satyanāth began his literary career long before he closed his academic life. He contributed excellent poems to *Asam Bandhu* and other local magazines and composed songs both serious and comic in standard or Lower Assam dialect. His comic songs like:

"Maroneki mekurito bātat ujuti khālon.
Āsāchedī hatar tāpat, thākiba nowarā halon"

"Āji majārce petuā pet bhari khā" etc.

represent songs in Upper Assam speech while such songs as:

"Hāi mor kapālkhān, barlā bhāt kemān khām,
Ājik lāgi biā nahāl mor:"
"Sunchāhānā āpigilā khājenā bārheichi:
Dibāk nali, nibāk dhari, pyedā lāgāi di" etc.

represent the Lower Assam dialect. His *Gītāwalī* is the first and perhaps the foremost book of modern Assamese songs issued in 1888. Satyanāth was first a poet; only at a later date he becme a prose writer.

Nevertheless, Satyanāth's fame now rests not so much on his poems as on his prose works. His *Sāhitya Vicār* is the first useful contribution to the science of literature in general showing its various divisions. He follows here the lines of treatment in Sanskrit and English works on the subject. So the work has become a bundle of contradictions in some points. Still the importance of the book cannot be ignored being the first work of literary criticism.

His *Gitāvali* (1888) is the first book modern songs.

His *Sāhitya Vicār*.

Sārathī is a collection of Satyanāth's essays on different subjects, illustrating the speciality of his style, his greatest contribution to modern Assamese prose. It is a useful work from other aspects besides. In it he gives us his valuable experiences of life. It is also important as a collection of essays, for there are only a few collections of essays in Assamese. But what we want to stress most is his particular styles—short pregnant sentences, aphoristic and Baconian in form. "Vidyā mānaw manar dīpti," (Learning is the lamp of the human mind); "Pūthir vidyā thupāi thowā dhanar nicinā" (Knowledge in books is like wealth accumulated); "Nyāyavanta mānuh tarjur nicinā" (A just man is like a true balance). The book is replete with such sentences. It is almost an inimitable style, and we see no follower of Satyanāth in this respect ; Satyanāth is lone. *Sārathi* is a guide not only to young men as he meant, it is also a guide to a new prose style in modern Assamese.

Sārathi a collection of S. N. B's essays.

Satyanāth's other useful works are *Ākāś Rahasya*, on astronomical subjects, and *Cintā-kali*, essays on different thoughts expressed in the local magazines from time to time and now re-issued as a posthumous work. His *Kendra-Sabhā* is another posthumous work. It is a collection of his humorous essays appearing earlier in local

The *Akāsa Rahasya*, *Cintā-Kali*, *Kendra-Sabhā*, *Babal Vyākaran* and other works.

F. 23

magazines. He was also a joint-editor of the second series of *Jonākī* published from Gauhati, with Kanaklal Baruwā whose sister had been his wife. Satyanāth's *Bahal Vyākaran* is also a comprehensive work on the subject though not without defects, for Satyanāth died while the book was being seen through the press. Satyanāth will live long in the memory of the posterity as a master of prose.

Ratneśvar Mahanta (1864-93), another short-lived youth of promise who died when he was reaching his manhood like Ānandarām and Lambodar, was born to Thaneśvar and Jayanti as their only son, and he lost his father, who was the Satrādhikār of Baligaru Satra in North Lakhimpur, before he attained his first year. His widowed mother did all she chould to bring up Ratneśvar who at last passed the Entrance examination from the Gauhati High School. His academic career stopped at this stage and he now came to Puraṇ Gudām, Nowgongi, to live under the wings of his maternal uncle. Here he married and became an accountant in the Nowgong court as encouraged by Rāi Bāhadur Guṇābhirām Baruwā, then an Extra-Assistant Commissioner. Unfortunately Ratneśvar's life was cut short by death which came with the black-water fever that attacked him in 1893.

Ratneśvar Mahanta (1864-93).

Ratneśvar had a promising literary career and was a regular contributor to *Assam Bandhu*, *Jonākī* and such other journals. He wrote an essay on Princess Jaymati which was for some time a leading historical essay in Assamese. His only work that appeared is his *Kavitā Hār*, a collection of poems which proves his poetic genius. His other works, a drama on *Draupadīr Benī Bandhan* and the second part of his *Kavitā Hār* remain incomplete and unpublished. Ratneśvar also wrote many articles under the pseudonym Rāmdās Goswāmī.

Body and soul are things which, however otherwise allied, cannot move at the same pace. So it was one thing to have the outer form of English literature into our language and quite another thing to command its inner spirit, and while the former entered our literature about the forties, the latter never did so till the eighties of the last century. So we come to the age to be familiarly known as the Age of *Jonākī* after the name of the monthly magazine, first published in 1889 and lasting till the first decade of the present century. This is the period we refer to as the Age of Romanticism in Assamese literature. True it is that direct or indirect influence of English literature was already felt about the seventies of the last century in the introduction of lyrical poems and the use of blank verse in epic poems by such writers as Ramākānta (1846-1889) and Bholānāth (1858-1929); but they were more concerned with the form than with the spirit of English literature. Modernism of course touched them. Poets like Bholānāth and Ramākānta and Kamalākānta are modern, as are Madhusudan and Bankimcandra in Bengali while poets like Viśweśwar, Dūtirām and Pūrṇakānta are not so, like Bhāratcandra, Īśwar Gupta, and Dīnabandhu in Bengali.

The Age of Romanticism in Assamese literature.

Candrakumār (1867-1938), Lakṣmīnāth (1868-1938) and Hemcandra (1872-1918) by themselves form a trio of modern Assamese literature even from their university days, when they first published *Jonaki* in 1889. They may aptly be compared with the Lake Poets of English Romanticism. Candrakumār, the real founder of *Jonākī*, and their leader in all points, played the most prominent part and contributed the most important elements of Romanticism through his poems. But, like the English poet Gray, few Assamese poets have climbed the Parnassus with so small bags in their hands. Almost all his poetical efforts are covered by two little volu-

Romantic elements of simplicity and Nature worship.

mes *Pratimā* (The Image) and *Been Barāgī* (The Lyric Ascetic) since published in the first and third decades of the present century. First, his language and style are always extremely simple, natural and colloquial, in contrast to the Sanskritized, artificial and rather bombastic style of his predecessors like Bholānāth. It is thus Wordsworthian. Secondly, his subjects dealt more directly with nature, and it was not merely as a background to the picture of human life, as it had never been used before. His poems like *Niyar* (The Dewdrops), *Fulā Sariyah Dara* (The blossoming mustard seed-plants) are full of the freshness of the natural world. Thirdly, the subject of Man, independence of nationality and class, also began to occupy more space in his poetry and it. shed new lustre over it as seen in his poems like *Viśva Bhāwariyā* (The Universal Actor), and *Mānaw-Bandanā* (Adoration of Man). In the English Romantic movement Wordsworth was supplemented by Coleridge who wrote about the supernatural. We find this as the fourth element in Candrakumār in such poems as *Ban-kunwari* (Wood-Nymphs) and *Jal-kunwari* (Mermaid). The fifth and sixth elements, viz., a deep feeling for the life of the poor, and a new form of poetry, like Scottish poetry, anticipating the ballad, are amply illustrated by Candrakumār's *Been-Barāgī* poems and the poems like *Tezimalā*. Lakṣmīnāth's main contribution to Assamese Romanticism is the popularizing of ballad poetry through a large number of poems like *Dhanbar āru Ratanī*, *Mālatī*, *Badan*. Hemcandra wrote the first Assamese sonnet, and many other beautiful poems. The former's *Kadamkalī* and the latter's *Fular Cānkī*, published about the first decade of the present century, are collections of poems scattered in old magazines.

Other elements—human, supernatural, feeling for the poor, encouragement of ballad poetry.

Like the English, the Assamese Romantic movement also expressed itself in various other channels besides poetry.

Lākṣmīnāth's farcical dramas, *Litikāi*, *Nomal*, *Cikarapati-Nikarpati*, as also Padmanāth's *Teton Tāmuly*, *Gāoṅburhā*, show this tendency in the drama. Rajanīkānta's *Miri Jiyari* is a living example of Romanticism in the field of novels. Poems of Ānandacandra, Benudhar, Padmanāth, Candradhar, Raghunāth, Durgeśvar also have some traits of this Romantic movement in common heritage. The seventh element, the passionate treatment of personal love (that was on the whole absent from English poetry since the Restoration and was restored by Robert Burns), is best seen in Candrakumār's poem *Mādhurī* (Sweetness) and *Sudhāmukh* (The Ambrosial Face); Lakṣmīnāth's *Bhram* (Delusion), *Priyatamār Saundarya* (Love's Beauty); in Hemcandra's *Priyatamār Ciṭhi* (Letter from the Beloved), *Kāko Āru Hiyā Nibilāoṅ* (No more shall I give my heart to anyone) and Ānandacandra's *Tai* (Thou), and so forth. This element has been quite prominent also among other pro-*Jonāki* poets. The *Jonāki* Age or the Romantic Period of Assamese literature actually stops at the first decade of the present century; but its influence is still felt. The luminaries that shone in that moon-lit festival have been setting now one by one, but it seems it will yet take some time before we can come to any well-defined new period of modern Assamese literature.

Romanticism carried to the domain of the drama and the novels.

Element of personal love.

Candrakumār Āgarwālā (1867-1938) was born on the 28th November at a place called Brahmajān in the Kalangpur Mauzā of the Tezpur sub-division in the Darrang district, as the second son of Haribilās Āgarwālā. Born of a Mārwārī father and an Assamese mother in Tezpur, Haribilās naturally inherited the business instincts of a Mārwārī from one parent and genuine love for Assamese, his mother tongue, from the other parent. For his education, he migrated to Dibrugarh and then to Sibsagar and lastly

Candrakumār Āgarwālā (1867-1938)

to Calcutta, when Haribilas was admitted to the Hindu School. He read here for some time and then started some business. Living in 10 Armenian Street, Calcutta, Candrakumār prosecuted his college studies and also helped his father in business. He was admitted to the Calcutta Presidency College where he had Deśabandhu Chittaranjan Dass as his friend.

Of keen intellect and independent nature Candrakumār was a bit too shy and of a true poetical temperament, which qualities he retained till his old age. After he passed his First Arts Examination he was ready to have a foreign education in England, but his father, though at first inclined, later on refused to send him to England on orthodox grounds, and therefore got him admitted to the B.A class in Calcutta. Disappointed in his ambition, Candrakumār was almost determined not to be a graduate from an Indian University with the result that he engaged himself in activities other than his studies and returned to Assam without a degree. He took to tea-plantation business where he was very successful and ended his active literary life.

The appearance of *Jonāki* (1889).

In his reminiscences Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā writes "Candrakumār Āgarwālā was then possibly in the Second Year class of the Presidency College, Calcutta....His smiling face, his sweet words and his charming demeanour attracted me towards him from the very day we first met. There was no delay in friendship being established between us. He was inclined towards literature, and so was I. He consulted us to bring out an Assamese monthly magazine, *Jonāki*. I encouraged him to the utmost and was ready to write articles for it. So had *Jonāki* seen the light of day about January, 1889. "A subject nation has no politics" is a memorable utterance of Sir Aśutosh Caudhuri, a Judge of the Calcutta High Court; but almost the same dictum found place in the

Ourselves (*Ātmakathā*) of this student-editor of *Jonāki* long before it found expression in the speech of that veteran politician. Indeed, the very excellent editorials of Candrakumār gave promise of a masterly Assamese prose writer and his beautiful poem *Ban-Kunwari* (The Wood-Nymph) held the promise of an original poetic genius in Assamese, besides bringing home the fact to many readers perhaps for the first time that poems suitable to the modern age could thus be written in naked or simple Assamese. *Nijar* (The Dew-drops) was another little poem of exquisite beauty published in this volume of *Jonāki*."

Pratimā (1913) and *Been Barāgi* (1923).

Such beautiful poems published in this magazine founded and edited by him, as also in the *Bānhi* subsequently founded and edited by Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā, were included in his first work *Pratimā* (The Image) published in 1913; and his *Been Barāgī* and other poems appearing later in the *Bānhi* were collected and published in his second and last volume of poems *Been Barāgi* published in 1923. Candrakumār's literary life looks rather indirect. He rather preferred to prepare the back-ground and be in it, as he did with the *Jonāki* in 1889 and with *Asamiyā* (The Assamese), the first regular and long standing weekly (later on converted to a bi-weekly and a daily) published in 1918. He also financed the *Bānhi* published from Assam since 1920.

Outwardly Candrakumār seemed to be a bundle of contradictions in his daily life. But like William Morris "the savour of the man's personality lay in the juxtaposition of these two divergent qualities, poetic imagination and practical sagacity". In 1921 he was described a man of middle stature, not apparently very robust, but indeed very smart and active which quality he retained till the last. His extremely quick and keen intelligence was manifest in his sparkling eyes and penetrating look. His exquisitely lov-

able heart was revealed in the sincerity and warmth of his behaviour. He was then a full-fledged "khaddarite," initiated of late to the Gāndhian faith by a direct touch of that magnetic personality; for Mahātmā Gāndhi happened to be a guest in his house during his first visit to Dibrugarh, the memory of which is cherished in his beautiful poem "Mahātmā" appearing as the first poem of his *Been Barāgī*. A prominent member of an aristocratic family and a leading tea-planter himself, he was rather anglicised in his habits till then; but once converted he remained true to his new faith in and out for the rest of his life.

Even in his old age he remained "a shy, sweet soul". As a man of business he seemed too strict and never sparing anybody and least of all himself; but in personal relations he was like the hero of Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* extremely generous even if in spite of himself.

With the advent of *Jonāki* in 1889 came the Age of Romanticism in Assamese literature as an echo of English Romanticism and Candrakumār was undoubtedly the high priest of this new movement. In his first few poems appearing in the first volume of *Jonāki* viz. *Ban Kunwari* (The Wood-Nymph), *Jal Kunwari* (The Mermaid), *Niyar* (The Dew-Drops) his spiritualisation and worship of Nature are apparent; and in such poems as *Prakṛti* (Nature) we find intellectualisation of Nature like Shelley. He is not concerned in such poems as the last with mere depicting Nature, but would also explain her; and would readily move from the external to the inner idea.

The poem *Mādhurī* (Sweetness) may be quoted to show the fine music of its verse :—

Futoṅ ne nufotoṅ kai · kumaliā kaliti:
Othat lājere rai micikiā hānhiti.
Sāmari pāhari gai meli ādhā prāṇṭi:
Udangāi dhāki thai uthi ahā bukuṭi.

Solokāi mokalāi ādhā bandhā khopāti:
Hay ne nahay kai edhā futā mātṭi.
Śuno ki nuśuno ai uti ahā gīṭi:
Riṇiki rinikikai karabār bānhīṭi.
Ucupi nicuki gai khantekiā thehṭi:
Lukuā bhumukākai chayā-mayā pechṭi.
Hānhowei ne kāndokai chalchaliā cakuṭi:
Dhemāli khangar nai miṭhā gāṅthi thopāti.
Olāon nolāon kai manamohā thagṭi:
"Na yayau na tasthau" agā-pichā bhariṭi.
Sānmihalir nai obhatani sotṭi:
Sāthar bhāngani hai pāni mithai goṭṭi.
Cāon ne necāonkai maramar dehiṭi.:
Devi ne mānavī ai Mādhurir chabiṭi.

The humanitarian note in Candrakumār is even moer prominent. We quote below his poem *Mānaw Bandanā* (Human worship) :

Āhiche mānuh, gaiche mānuh, mānuh mayāpī jīwa:
Mānuh sotar, anta nāikiā, bulile marat kiya ?
Mānavī janam, diā utuai, mānavī karam sote:
Mānuhar maram, bujibā mānuhe, dharam je maramate.
Mānuhei lag, mānuhei sang, mānuhei parātpar:
Ei ye prithivi svargato adhik, mānuhar nijāpi ghar.
Mānuhei dew, mānuhei sew, mānuh bine nāi kew.
Karāṅ karāṅ pujā, pādya arghā lai, yay yay mānaw dew.

This very idea is re-iterated in his *Been Barāgī* in later years.

Along with Candrakumār, the humanitarian, we find Candrakumār the revolutionist. He was never a "crowd worshipper" and though so genuinely interested in Man, "he was like a star and dwelt apart." He had a Shelleyan thirst for freedom and a Shelleyan hatred for all external restraints of society. But licence was not his idea of liberty; it was to "rule the Empire of Self", not by brute-force but by soul-force which is Love. He describes brute-force and

F. 24

inequality in society, and bursts into such strains in his *Been Barāgī* :

> Ānguli bulāba, janā hale āji, pelāloṅheten ṭāni:
> Himālay curhā, burāloṅheten, uchāli kaliā pānī.
> Ākāśar tarā, numāloṅheten thapiāi lākhe lākhe:
> Jon beli grah, pelāloṅheten, daliyāi jāke jāke.
> Pāpar majiā, namāloṅheten, athāi sāgarar tal:
> Brahmāṇḍar cin, thākilheten, māthoṅ samudrar jal.
> Mān apamān, dhauwāi jak, prithivīr parā guci:
> Natun sṛṣṭir karuṅ kiraṇe, karok sakalo śuci.
> Bhok lāj bhay, nāthakiba, āru natun jagat sito :
> Heroā bīnar, ānandar sur, bājiba dinare dinto.

That is—"Did I but know how to move the fingers, would I pull down and drown the Himalayan peak. I would snatch down the heavenly bodies by lacs and would throw away the Moon and the Sun and the planets by crowds. I would push down this Earth full of sins to the bottom of the unfathomed sea, the water of which would alone be a proof of this universe. Let Respect and Disrespect be washed away from the shores of the Earth, and let the dawning of a New Creation purify everything with its new golden light. Sorrow, Disgrace and Fear will then all depart, for it will be a New Universe where the tune of Joy awaking from the lost lyre (of Love) shall be ringing all day long."

Candrakumār's message of democracy.

Unlike the mass of modern Assamese poems Candrakumār's poetry is not a colourless thing. It is coloured by his individuality and eloquent by the message he gives. It is a message of love and democracy. Though a thin democratic note is not inaudible in his *Pratimā*, it is surely eloquent in his *Been Barāgī*. The lyrical ascetic, who is surely the poet himself, addresses his lyre which symbolises his muse, and relates his own experiences. It is a tale of the woes of the poor the memory of which makes his heart break. He sees how friends cook the flesh of friends and feast on them, and

how friends light their lamps with the blood of their friends to make their floors glitter. He sees how they bring their own ruin. He shows that the royal road to happiness is not that way but lies through harmony in Man, through love or kindness which alone is Religion.

Like some of the poets of the school of Donne Candrakumār wrote some poems where philosophical ideas are fused with lyric feeling as seen in his *Viśva Bhāwariya*, *Mai* (the Self) and many poems in *Been Barāgī*. Here is *Mai*:

Candrakumār as metaphysical poet.

Saṁsār morei pūrṇa dekhoṅ:
    Āchoṅ māthoṅ niranjan Mai:
Nāi tumi keoṅ āru nāi,
    Pārāṅ yadi hoāṅ mote loy.
Mai Mai Mai mātra bipul saṁsāre,
    Mai Mai Mai sure śunā
Bājiche prāṇar bīnā tān,
    Mai bine ācheno ki guāṇ.

That is—"I see the world full of Me. It is only the spotless Me that lives, no Thee and none else than Me exist. If you can then do merge in Me. This vast Universe is nothing but Me, Me, Me. Hark ! the lyre of Life is awake with the tune Me, Me, Me. Think what else is there other than Me."

In common with all metaphysical poets, Candrakumār's verses sometimes seem to suffer from obscurity of thought and at other times in his anxiety to pour out his message he sometimes stammers with his verses. Indeed poems of both Candrakumār and Lakṣmīnāth suffer not infrequently from defective rhyming, partly because they paid little attention to smooth prosody, and partly due to the fact that they shaped their verses after indigenous Assamese ballads the rhyming of which depended mainly on accent.

Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā (1868-1938) was the fifth son

out of the nineteen children by the two wives of Dīnanāth Bezbaruwā. He was born during the transfer of his father, an Extra-Assistant Commissioner, from Nowgong to Barpetā, moving by a country boat, since steamers or trains were not known in Assam in those days. The place where the boat was anchored for the night is known as Āhatguri.

Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā (1868-1938).

In his *Reminiscences* Lakṣmīnāth, in his usual interesting and humorous style, describes his early impressions of Barpetā, Tezpur, Lakhimpur and Gauhāti towns to which his father was successively transferred, and also gives a vivid description of his family's romantic journeys by boat on the Brahmaputra. Dīnanāth Bezbaruwā retired from Government service in 1873 and came to settle in his old home at Sibsagar where Lakṣmīnāth was admitted first to the Vernacular and then to the Government High English School. He narrates how he disliked the dry and rigorous school discipline and the dusky atmosphere within its four walls, and he hardly claims anything above mediocrity in his studies. He passed the Entrance examination in 1886 in the Second Division with a scholarship of Rs. 20/- per mensem to prosecute higher studies in Calcutta. He got himself admitted first to the Ripon College and then passed the First Arts Examination from the City College. In due course, he graduated himself from Calcutta and attached himself to the post-graduate English and Law classes, but could secure no degree. He was the leader of the band of Law students of Calcutta who filed a suit of compensation against the Calcutta University for setting questions outside the syllabus in the final examination and for being responsible for the failure of so many candidates.

His early life and academic career.

Heredity, education and environment are regarded as three important factors determining one's character.

Applying this formula to the life of Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā, we first of all see how heredity determined his literary career. His mother, the second wife of Dīnanath Bezbaruwā (1813-95), came of the illustrious family of the great Vaiṣṇava poet of the fifteenth century, Ananta Kandalī; and his father, the chief physician of the last Ahom king Purandar Siṅha, was a bit of a poet. The education and environment of Lakṣmīnāth were the best under the circumstances. Born and brought up in an orthodox Hindu family of old, he was truly cultured in the oriential way; and he received his higher education and post-graduate training in a city like Calcutta. In 1891 he married Prajñā Sundarī Devī, niece of Rabindranath Tagore, thus gaining for himself a most cultured atmosphere of modern times. True as it may seem that his timber business was hardly congenial to his literary life, we may see that he created his own atmosphere even then, living at Howrah and Sambalpur where he carried on his business.

His literary genius manifested itself even as a University student. It was kindled by his friendship, which became intimate and life-long, with Candrakumār Āgarwālā who was then living with his father in 10 Armenian Street, Calcutta. Their acquaintance led to the inception of the famous Assamese monthly magazine *Jonāki* about February, 1889, under the three-fold responsibility, as Editor, Manager and Proprietor, of Candrakumār. With the first issue of *Jonāki* began the splendid literary career of Lakṣmīnāth and with nothing less than the famous farce *Litikāi* which was completed in twelve issues. In his *Reminiscences*, the writer tells us that on account of his shyness he wrote the farce secretly on the benches of the Eden Garden, Calcutta, in pencil on very thin paper, and without making any fair copy of it, handed over the manuscript in instalments to his editor-friend who accepted them gladly even though

His *Litikāi* (1889).

his editorial rules were apparently violated. It was a tremendous success, and the readers of *Jonāki* hailed Lakṣmīnāth as a new promising writer. *Litikāi* (The Page) was reprinted as a book about 1890.

His *Kripabār Baruwār Kākatar Topolā* (1904) and *Padumkunwari* (1905)

Padum Kunwari (The Lotus Queen), a novel, his second work which saw the light of day in a book form, in 1905, also owes its origin to the same magazine *Jonāki*, in its third year, now edited by Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā himself. This novel written in connection with the historical event Danduwā Droh or the Rebellion of Haradatta and Biradatta of Kāmrup, and on the same theme on which Rajanikānta wrote another novel. Lakṣmīnāth's style predicted a masterly writer. *Kripabār Barunār Kākatar Topolā* or the Assamese "Pickwick Papers", appeared in a book form in 1904, and as in the case of Charles Dickens, it brought the writer into immediate and lasting fame. Now Candrakumār came to reside with Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā and Hemcandra Goswāmī and thus was formed the illustrious trinity of the Assamese Romantic Movement.

Other works.

His essays like *Kāmat Kṛtitwa Labhibar Sanket* (How to win success in life), *Dīnānāth Bezbaruwar Jiwanī* (the life-sketch of his father) and *Bākhar* (The Gem i.e., Character) appeared as booklets in 1903, 1909 and 1914 respectively. His *Bhāratbarṣar Buranji* (History of India) and *Bhāgavat Kathā* (Talk about the Bhāgawat), written after Marsden and Kshitindranath Tagore respectively—the former published about 1910 and the latter in 1915, were, with the three essays, meant for the children. His *Junukā* in prose and verse, *Burhī Āir Sādhu* (Grand-Mother's Tales) and *Kākadentā Āru Nātilarā* (Grand-father and Grandson) published in 1910, 1911 and 1912 respectively are Assamese folk-tales written in a very interesting style for young children. He also wrote and published *Śankardeva* and *Mahāpuruṣ*

Śri Śankaradew Āru Śri Mādhawadew in 1911 and 1914 respectively, thus rendering a great service to the cause of Assamese Vaiṣṇavite literature.

His Humour.

Back again to his humorous writings. *Kripābar Baruwār Obhotani*, rather the second instalment of what has been termed the Assamese "Pickwick Papers" was published in 1909; and the worthy followers of his farce *Litikāi* (The Page), *Nomal*, *Pācani* and *Cikārpati Nikārpati*, all appeared in the year 1913. All these farces were based on popular traditions or folk-tales and very elegantly written. Along with these he also wrote short stories the first of which appeared in the *Jonāki* now edited by Satyanāth Barā in collaboration with his brother-in-law Kanak Lāl Baruwā, and published from Gauhati after its sixth volume. So his short story books *Surabhi*, *Sādhu Kathār Kuki* and *Jonbiri*, appeared in 1909, 1912 and 1913 respectively.

Bānhi, another illustrious monthly magazine edited by Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā for more than 24 years was first published from 2 Lal Bazar Street, Calcutta. Like *Jonāki*, which it may be said to continue, it was an immense success and took modern Assamese literature a long way in the path of progress. But Lakṣmīnāth was not confined to this alone. He published his collection of beautiful poems, comic and serious, *Kadam Kali*, in 1913, and his historical dramas *Cakradhvaja Simha*, *Jaymati Kuṁwari* and *Belimār* (The Sunset) were published about the same year in 1915. Whether or not his dramas are things of beauty for the footlight, they are undoubtedly great contributions to Assamese literature. Besides his creation of such beautiful imaginary characters as that of Dālimi in the drama *Jaymati Kuṁwari*, all his dramas abound in scenes of high excellence and songs of great poetic grandeur and majesty.

As in poems and songs sometime in prose and

also in a few dramatic character sketches such as his Pijau Gābharu in *Belimār* or Dālimi in *Jaymati Kunwari*, he betrays a poetic genius of high order. His Dālimi, like Dwijendralāl's Mānasā in the Bengali drama *Mewār Patan*, appears truly "a dream of bliss", to use the term of his hero. But in these character-sketches as well as in some of his songs and poems we may detect him borrowing thoughts, ideas or lines from Sanskrit or English, and not acknowledging. His imaginary character of Dālimi, for example and of which we have so much spoken, appears by the name Jinu in another drama of the same name by Padmanāth Baruwā and of the same historical event published a few years before him; and a character even exactly of the same name and situation, though both are imaginary, appears in the first Assamese romantic novel *Miri Jiyari* by Rajanīkānta Bardalai published more than a dozen years before him. Can we in any way then ascribe this to Lakṣmīnāth's lack of the gift of originality? We may simply quote Emerson's words said in regard to Chaucer, in our reply to this question: "It has come to be practically a sort of rule in literature, that a man, having once shown himself capable of original writing, is entitled therefore to steal from the writings of others at discretion. Thought is the property of him who can adequately place it. A certain awkwardness marks the use of borrowed thoughts; but as soon as we have learned what to do with them, they become our own."

His creative genius and the question of 'borrowing' in literature.

Like George Bernard Shaw, Lakṣmīnāth was shocked to hear one calling him a poet. Nevertheless he *was* a poet and was responsible for many exquisite poems. Unfortunately he did not take poetry seriously and liked rather to appear as an amateur in the art, but all-the-same, his *Barāgī Āru Been* (latterly named *Been Barāgī*), *Priyatamār*

Saundarjya, *Bhram* (Error) and a dozen of other poems whether included or not in his *Kadam Kali* are really gifted works. We quote the poem *Bhram* (Error):

Kone kāle seyā, bānhi bāje buli ? Bandevī gīt gāi:
Śewālir mālā, nahay ei dhar, tarāre gunthiche hāi.
Nahay fulani, kunwarisakal, darhāi darhāi kaoṅ:
Golāp nahay, priyār nayan, dekhi thar hai raoṅ.
Kone kay siti, hariṇā poāli? Imān cetanā nāi:
Banar saundarjya, rūp dhari āhi, deodi dubari khāi.
Nahay pukhuri, premikar hiā: pānī nahay prem-ras:
Nai nahay, thik premar prabāh, bicāri prem bibas.
Bīnār ātmāti, uri gān gāi, koneno bhomora bole :
Khopār fulti, uriye priyār, pakhilār nām pāle.
Kriṣṇa pakhi kaichā, pātar majat Kriṣṇa Kriṣṇa dāk diche ?
Pakhi nohe jānā, Rādhār kāndon, pratidhvani rūpe āche.
Mainā nahay, birahisavar, goṭkhowā humuniyā :
Priyatamā mukh ofandi pariche, seyche jānā sandhiyā.

That is—'Who says it is the flute that is being played on ? It is the sylvan deity who is singing. This is not a garland of the Śephāli flowers; it has been woven with stars. is no flower garden ; it is the princesses of flowers that are gathering. I tell you with all the emphasis I command, it is no roses; these are the eyes of the beloved which I look at so steadfastly. Who is so unconscious to say it is the fawn at play ? It is truly the Beauty of the forest that assumes this form and eats 'dūrbā' grass thus hopping. It is no tank, it is the heart of love; it is no water, it is love in a liquid state. This is no river; it is the current of love, mad after its fellow current. Who calls it a black bee ? It is the soul of the harp that hums. That is no butterfly, but the flower of my beloved's khopā (lock of hair) that has become so. You call it a Kṛṣṇa bird that sings "Kṛṣṇa" "Kṛṣṇa" ? It is no bird, but the wailing of Rādhā that is being resounded. It is no Mainā bird ; but it is the heap of sighs of those women in separation. It is on

Sandhiyā (Evening time); it is the beloved's face puffed up.'

Lakṣmīnāth is also the father of a type of pastoral poetry written in imitation of folk-songs and ballads. The most popular of such poems is his poem on Badan Phukan who first brought the Burmese into Assam, the poem beginning as:

The father of new pastoral poetry.

Kiyano ānili Mān, ai Badan tai kiyano ānili mān?
Yāuti yugalai, khiāti rākhili, Asamar katāli kān.
Sonare Asamat, dakāit meli dili, Nandanat melili hāti.
Bargharar majiāt, fetīgom erili, bhar dupariā rāti.

That is—'Why have you brought the Burmese, O Badan, what for should you have brought the Burmese? You have perpetuated your ill reputation, and you have disgraced Assam. You have set robbers in this Assam of gold; Oh, you have set elephants to destroy? Eden! You have set the ferocious cobra in the floor of the bed-room at dead of night.' Another beautiful poem of this class is his *Bar āru Saru* (Big and Small):

Dubari banar, pātar ārat, niyare mukutā āṅre:
Okhar malayāi, maramar hātere, cotālar dhūli sāre.
Bokār padumat, hānhiti jilike, ākāśar hānhiti pari:
Ketekīr sonāli, reṇuti uril, cenehar cumāti bhari.
Parvatar tingare akaṇi nijarā, nāmi bhuiṅr bukalai gal:
Cenehar hātere, bhuiyṅe sābatile, rangate bandi hai ral.
Dubari banatkai, saru tai Lakṣmīnāth, dhūliro talare dhūli:
Toko nāpāhare priyatkai priyai tor, ādari labahi tuli.

This is—'The dew hangs pearls on the leaves of the 'dūrbā' grass. The breeze from high sweeps the dusts of the courtyard with hands of affection. The smile of heaven induced the smile of the lotus in the mud. The gold dust of the Keteki flower flies up being filled with the kiss of affection (of the wind so high). The tiny spring from the mountain peak has descended to the low land that has

embraced it with arms of affection, and the spring has remained imprisoned in joy. You are humbler than the 'dūrbā', O Lakṣmīnāth, you are dust under the dust; but you too will not be neglected by our dearest of the dear; and you will be received warmly into his arms.'

As a preacher of Śaṅkardeva's faith.

One of the important contributions of Lakṣmīnāth is his researches on the Vaiṣṇavite literature. His two works *Śaṅkardeva* and *Śaṅkardeva and Mādhavadeva* are but a fraction of his writings on the subject. It may be that his researches may now be over shadowed by new researches, but all the same Lakṣmīnāth is bound to be remembered as the first inspirer. Lakṣmīnāth's mother claimed descent from the Vaiṣṇavite poet Ananta Kandalī, so devoted to Śaṅkardeva; and his predecessors were all initiated to the faith of Śankardeva. Though Lakṣmīnāth became a Brāhma, his faith in Śaṅkardeva's religion remained life-long.

As humorist.

Unlike most of the Assamese writers Lakṣmīnāth embarked on his literary career as a humorist and it is as a humorist that he is remembered even now by the majority of his readers. The seven poor idiotic brothers had just lost their father who, as they used to say, held them each in his womb for ten months and ten days, not long after the death of their mother; and yet by an irony of fate they turned to be servants of a shrewd and selfish Brahmin for no other fault than that the Brahmin had to make the difficult discovery of the missing seventh of them—missing because each of the seven counted their heads leaving his own. This is the first scene of his *Litikāi*. And so in this farce and in all other comic writings such as *Nomal*, *Pācani*, *Cikārpati Nikārpati*, *Kṛpābar Baruwār Kākatar Topolā*, *Kṛpābar Baruwār Obhotani*, and others in his *Bānhi* and other periodicals, he makes us sincerely laugh and enjoy the fun of life.

The tremendous popularity which Lakṣmīnāth commanded by the appearance of his *Kṛipābar*, was not only literary but also social. It suggested reform. So behind his humour lay the aim of social reform. Son of a Head Physician (Bezbaruwā), he knew his business in literature, and doctored his society with a smile on his lips. With the horrors of invasions still in memory and with its literature molested and itself deprived of self-confidence never did the nation need so badly to be taught to laugh. Rightly may we call his humour "a rainbow humour," for Lakṣmīnāth mostly smiled through his tears. This applies, for example, to the humour of his *Litikāi*, and applies generally to his *Kṛipābar*. Assamese society consisted of his own people whose vices he was so pained at heart to see and so used literature as a medium of his sermons.

As a reformer.

Lakṣmīnāth may also be regarded as the founder of modern short story. He not only collected and edited the old folk-tales in his *Burhī Āir Sādhu* and *Kakādeutā āru Nāti Larā*, but also wrote the short stories of *Sādhukathār Kuki*, and *Surabhi* and many more stories besides published in *Bānhi* and other local magazines. His stories show a great range of subjects culled generally from Assamese society as the story of *Āmār Saṁsār*, and praticularly from village life as the story of Bhadari. Such stories also illustrate Lakṣmīnāth's careful observation, painting of characters true to life, psychological study of situations and character, and above all, a broad human sympathy. Bhadari, a poor peasant's wife was stabbed by her husband in a fit of fury and hunger, and lay senseless for days together in a hospital where she had been taken by the police. When she came to her sense, the first word she uttered was about her husband's satisfying his hunger; and when tried in the court, in order to shield him against

As a founder of modern short stories in Assamese.

imprisoment she told the noble and generous untruth that it was she who got herself accidentally wounded, a statement which draws tears from every one's eyes.

Lakṣmīnāth was the uncrowned king of Assamese literature for nearly thirty years preceding his death. If the skeleton of modern Assamese literature was built by the American Baptist missionaries, it is the trinity of Anandarām-Hemcandra-Guṇābhirām that gave it flesh and blood; and it was Lakṣmīnāth whoseeff orts made it pulsate with life. He was undoubtedly the acknowledged dictator of Assamese literature during the above period with a towering personality and with command over all spheres of Assamese literature , old and new. He had at once been a terror and an inspirer to all new writers with the Kripābar's rod and with the magic healing of a Bezbaruwā or master-physician which he had really been.

The uncrowned king of Assamese literature for three decades.

Hemcandra Goswāmī (1872-1928) was born on the 8th January in a place called Dhekiāl in the Golāghāt subdivision. His father Dambarudhar Goswāmī who was a Mauzadār of the place died in his pilgrimage at Banaras when Hemcandra was only eight years old. He, with his younger brother and sister, was brought up by his widowed mother Ghanakāntī, and Hemcandra passed his Entrance examination from Nowgong in the First Division in 1888. He secured a merit scholarship of Rs. 20/- per mensem with the help of which he got himself admitted to the Presidency College, Calcutta, whence he passed the First Arts examination in 1890. Here he came in touch with Candrakumār and Lakṣmīnāth with whom a literary friendship was soon established and the trinity formed which brought about the happy Romantic movement in Assamese literature. Being too much pre-occupied with literary

Hemcandra Goswāmī (1872-1928).

activities, he failed in the B.A. examination in 1892 and returned home without any degree.

He married Bāmā Sundarī in May 1888, and now with the help of his father-in-law desired to study law privately. Side by side he managed to get the post of the Headmaster of Sonārām Aided High school, Gauhāti, and also happened to come across a manuscript of *Assam History* which he rendered into English. Introduced with this work by a well-wisher of Hemcandra to Mr. Gait, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam (later Sir Edward Gait, author of *A History of Assam*), he came under happier stars, and was soon appointed a Sub-Deputy Collector on December 2, 1895; and from this post he was promoted to be an Extra-Assistant Commissioner on the 2nd May, 1905, whence he retired on January 15, 1926, then drawing a pay of Rs. 750/- per mensem. He could not enjoy his well-earned pension very long, for he died two years and three months after on 2nd May at 11 A. M. at his own residence at Gauhāti, when he was only past 56 years old.

At Nowgong.

"When Hemcandra was only thirteen his mother contrived to have him sent to Nowgong to live with a relative of the family for the purpose of education. Nowgong was then the centre of the literary revival which followed the due recognition of Assamese as the language of the schools and courts. The leading figure was Rāi Bāhādur Guṇābhirām Baruwā, the virtual dictator of the Assamese literature of the nineteenth century. Among the members of the circle were persons whose contributions have mainly formed the nucleus of modern Assamese literature. They were Bholānāth Dās the poet, Ratneśvar Mahanta the antiquarian, Padmahās Goswāmi the free-thinker, Rudrarām Bardalai, Dharmeśvar Goswāmi, Baladeva Mahanta, Balinārāyaṇ Barā, Naranāth Mahanta, Ratnadhar

Baruwā, Candrahās Bhuyān, Mahadānanda Bhattācāryā, Mrs. Padmāwati Devī Phukanani and Mrs. Viṣṇupriyā Devī. Being thrown into the atmosphere of Nowgong, an impressionable youth like Hemcandra Goswāmī, whose literary instincts had already been roused could not long remain outside its domination. Rāi Bāhādur Guṇābhirām Baruwā was not slow in detecting the potentiality of the youth, and welcomed the latter's articles in the pages of the *Asam Bandhu* of which he was the founder and editor." (Preface to the *Asamiyā Sāhityar Cāneki*, Vol. I p. XXVI).

His earliest publication *Fular Cāki* (1907).

Hemcandra's services to Assamese literature were of a little different from those of his friends, Candrakumār and Lakṣmīnāth, of the *Jonāki* coterie. In his school days and in his college days his poetic gift was more prominent. Indeed he wrote some of his poems, first published in *Asam Bandhu* edited by Guṇābhirām Baruwā and then included in his collection of poems, *Fular Cāki* (A Garland of Flowers), in his school days. Many of his poems as *Jonāki* or *Puwā* show a poetic diction and a majesty of poetic style and metre with a command over the art that would do honour to any first rate poet of the time. Then his pleasing love-poem *Kāko Aru Hiyā Nibilāon* (To none shall I give my heart any more) appeared in the second issue of the first volume of *Jonāki* and his beautiful poem *Jonāki* (The Glow-worm) was published in the first issue of third volume of this journal.

Hemcandra also showed the first sample of a sonnet in Assamese in his Priyatamār Ciṭhi (A Letter from the Beloved) with the octave and sestete and observing the rhyming forms of the original Italian type ; and this too was published in the *Jonāki*. Here is the sonnet which sang a distinct tune of romanticism in Assamese literature.

"Saundarjyar bukur kāncali udangāi :
Prakṛtir co-ghar cālon pit pit:
Kukurā-thengiā sei ākhar kiṭit
Yi mohinī sanā āche kato āru nāi.
Kavi-nikunjat fuli kata kavitāi.
Malayāt uti uti fure prithivīt:
Tomār cithiye kintu jāne jiti git.
Kavitār kāvye tār gondhako nāpāi.
Ful fule, sari yāy, śukāi banani,
Basantar kunhipāt radat lerele:
Tomār cithiye priye, jāne ki mohini
Nitau nohoā bāhi na na ful mele.
Yate śungo, cumā khāon, nālāge āmani:
Hridayat hapāhar bhotā tarā jvale."

His first composition of an Assamese sonnet (? 1890).

That is—'Have I searched the green-room of Nature through and through by removing the wrapper of Beauty's chest; but never have I found such a charm pasted anywhere as it is in this handwriting that is hen-footed. How many poems without number blossoming in the bowers of poets have wafted in the cool fragrant (malaya) breeze; but the poetry of the poets has not even a scent of that song which your letter knows. The flower blossoms and withers, and so does the grass and the new lovely leaves of the Spring; but what charm your letter knows O beloved, that there blossom flowers that are ever new and know no withering; and however much I smell and kiss, I feel not tired, and there yet shines the Venus of desire.'

Hemcandra's claim to the memory of the posterity.

We have already referred to the various contributions of Hemcandra Goswāmī, not strictly original, but often more important than the so-called original works of most of the average writers. Hemcandra and Lakṣmīnāth's early zeal in helping Candrakumār, who as he personally said conducted *Jonāki* by denying himself the comfort

which he would buy with the money sent to him for his monthly allowance, is proverbial. Hemcandra's assistance to Colonel Gurdon in editing the *Hemkoṣa* and to Gait in hunting materials for the latter's *History of Assam* was certainly more than that of a subordinate to his superior. Hemcandra's discharge of duties as a special officer from October, 1912 to March, 1913, for collection of old Assamese manuscripts was also more than a mere official duty. His contribution to the establishment of the Assam Research Society and of the Assam Literary Association, and his compiling and editing of the *Typical Selections of Assamese Literature* for the Calcutta University, *Kathā Gītā*, *Kathā Bhāgavat*, *Purāṇ Asam Buranji* and many other works will remember him to posterity even long after many other things die.

The early Assamese novelists.

Romanticism in Assamese literature was in no way confined to poetry, but was carried on also to other domains such as that of the novel. We have earlier referred to late Mrs. Padmāwatī Phukanani's *Sudharmār Upākhyān* issued in 1884 from Nowgong, Assam; but it was really far from a novel in the strict sense of the term. The writer plainly admits in the preface: "Saj āru asaj mānuhar karjyar fal dekhuwāi ei puthir pradhāṇ uddeśya." That is, it was the principal aim of this book to show the respective results of good and evil deeds. So here the book rather describes the deeds of the hero Satyavān and the heroine Sudharmā, more as a long story than studying their problems of life. Padmanāth Baruwā was practically the next in the field for writing his social novel *Bhānumatī* in the magazine *Bijuli* in 1892. He also published his *Lāharī*, another novel, in 1890. Rajanīkānta Bardalai, about whom we shall presently speak, wrote his novels about this time, and another writer Hareśvar Śarmā also published his novel *Kusum Kumārī* in 1899.

Rajanīkānta Bardalai's (1867-1939) grandfather Tuwārām Dihingiyā Bardalai, earlier resided somewhere in Upper Assam whence he left for Śāntipur in Navadwip, Bengal, after his elder brother was put to death by the Burmese in their notorious invasions of Assam, one of the main causes which led their grandson to take this historical event for themes of nearly half a dozen of his novels. Tuwārām returned well-versed in his Sanskrit learning there and settled for some years at a place called Bajāli in the Kāmrup district, where he subsequently married and his son Narakānta, the father of Rajanīkānta, had been born. Thence they moved first to the village Bāosi in Hājo and then to Gauhati when the town came to be first established. Here Rajanīkānta was born on the 24th November. His father was at first a clerk at Gauhati in the office of General Jenkins, then helped the survey and settlement work of the town, and lastly served and retired as a clerk of the Chief Commissioner's office when it was first established at Shillong.

Rajanīkānta Bardalai (1867-1939).

Rajanīkānta lost his father when he was nine and his next brother seven years old; the two other younger brothers who were then five and two years old respecitvely soon followed their father. Rajanīkānta then had his maternal uncle as his guardian and passed the Entrance examination in 1885 in the Second Division with a scholarship of Rs. 20/ per mensem. He got admitted to the Metropolitan Institution (now Vidyasagar College), Calcutta, whence he passed the First Arts examination in 1887 in the First Division. He then got admitted to the B. A. class in the City College and got his B. A. degree in 1889.

As in the case of Lakṣmīnāth and many others, *Jonāki* became the common touch-stone of their literary life. So he essayed an article as a medical student on physi-

His first literary venture.

ology and contributed it to this paper. After graduation he left his medical studies and returned home to serve as a clerk in the Deputy Commissioner's office at Gauhati, whence he was transferred to be a Census clerk there which experience he utilised in his humorous article *Census Piyal* published in the magazine *Bānhi* in 1909 under his pseudonym Bholāi Śarmā. While still a clerk there he collaborated with Kanak Lāl Baruwā and Gopal Kṛṣṇa De to write a drama named *Sāvitrī-Satyavān*, which had since been lost in manuscript; and they formed an Amateur Theatre Party, an experience which again he utilised in another humorous article *Ātma-Vinodak Theatarar Dal* (An Amateur Theatre Party) written under the same pseudoname Bholāi Śarmā and published in the monthly magazine *Alocani* in 1909.

Having been in the good books of the then Census Superintendent Mr. (since Sir Edward) Gait author of *History of Assam*, Rajanīkānta was promoted in 1892 to be a Sub-Deputy Collector at North Lakhimpur where he had an intimate knowledge of the Miri life which inspired him to write his first Assamese romantic novel *Miri-Jiyari* where he brings in a description also of the Lakhimpur court. Here he wrote a monograph on *Religion of the Miris* for Gait. In 1894 he was transferred to Barpeta where he wrote his first historical novel *Manomati* where we find also some description of the Barpeta Satra. In 1901 he was promoted to be an Extra Assistant Commissioner from which post he retired in February, 1918.

An extremely good soul as Rajanīkānta undoubtedly had been, his life abounded in family misfortunes beginning with the deaths of his father and two younger brothers in his boyhood. In 1909 he lost his thirteen year old second son, and in the following year his first son who just passed the First Arts examination in the first division and stood

seventh in the Calcutta University, died of typhoid. In December 1918, unhappy, however, in his service life, he took to business and established the Haveda tea-garden in Makum, Dibrugarh, spending all he earned in his life and devoted himself heart and soul into it in his retired life. But by and by it also failed and he had to sell the tea garden and all he had at Dibrugarh to relieve himself of debt. He now came to Gauhati to count and pass his days peacefully, if possible; but here also he was disappointed. He soon had a bad attack of paralysis to which he succumbed. He died at Gauhati in a locality near about the one where he was born.

His historical novels.

Rajanīkānta wrote little besides his novels, that will be long remembered. One school text book, *Jñānoday* (1897), one monthly journal *Pradīpikā* (1925-26) of religious controversies, a few monographs, scientific articles and Presidential Addresses are all that is meant. But the humorous stories or narrations now collected and published as Bholāi Śarmā will no doubt he enjoyed long by Assamese readers for the large-hearted sympathy of Rajanikānta's humour, a rare thing indeed. His exquisite romantic novel *Miri-Jiyari* (1895) is his only novel that is not historical. His *Danduwā Droh* (1909), *Rādhā-Rukmiṇir Raṇ* (appearing in the isrues of Asam Hitaiṣi—1925) and *Tāmreṣwari Mandir* published in the issues of Asam Hitaiṣi in 1926) are novels of different epochs and events of the history of Assam. His *Manomati* (1900), *Rangili* (1925), *Nirmal Bhakat* (1925) and *Rahdai Ligiri* (1930) are novels bearing on the events of Burmese invasions of Assam. These four novels may rather be called four parts of one novel tracing the full development of this or that character, above others, in certain parts, and giving a panoramic view of the horrible days of the Burmese.

A man of simple straightforward nature, full of good sense, he had a genuine love for the common people around

him whose simplicity and idiosyncrasies too he heartily sympathised. Retired of late from Assam Civil Service and heard through the length and breadth of Assam as one of the greatest personalities of Assamese literature, Rajānīkānta, as the story goes, was driven to the back bench in a monster meeting by ignorant volunteers when he went to take his seat on a chair reserved for the elite of the town like one of which he did not seem in his good old-fashioned ways!

So novels in his hand do not appear so much as a type of literature borrowed from Europe, but have often the spontaneity and ease of gossip or tales told by the fireside by our grandfathers about the horrors of Burmese invasions or such allied subjects from the past history of Assam. He had not only a genius for vitalising the past and a happy knack of improvisation, but was also endowed with a creative energy of imagination which is responsible for so many beautiful fictitious characters of his novels like Dālimi, Pānei, Manomati, Pamili, Rangili, Rahdai and many others that appear as living among us. Unlike many other humorists of Assamese literature of his day, his humour never verged on satire, satire usually smelling the moralist. But again like Scott he was a moralist in effect, if not by intent. In the whole range of his fictitions charaters hardly do we come across the shadow of a real villain, man or woman; and even in depicting villains of history, Satrām, for example, in his *Rangili*, he is scrupulously careful on this point, with the result that in such cases also we do not find a really bad man but a man who does bad deeds. In this very novel, for example, we find several pairs of lovers engrossed in love-making on the occasion of nocturnal Bihu dances, but not a single girl is molested. On being entreated for a kiss, one young girl appreciates her lover's sentiment while denying him the boon asked for: 'Do marry me soon, and then have as many

long long kisses your heart would desire. But now good night! My companions are awaiting me yonder.'

All this betrays great breadth and long range of his sympathies. Even as a humorist we find that he prefers to laugh with his people laughing at them, and if he has to laugh at anybody's cost he would do so at his own. His Bholāi Śarmā, directly Rajanīkānta himself, engaged as a Census Enumerator was at a fix to ascertain the age of a young girl who could not or would not commit it herself. Age in case of bullocks is judged by seeing their teeth, and the idiosyncrasy of the Enumerator prompted him to ask the girl to show him her teeth, when, to his surprise he found the girl wild with anger at this insult, though not meant, rushing upon him with the broomstick to assult, when lo! he took to his heels and fled.

His broad human ympathy and kindly shumour.

Thus we find that like Sir Walter Scott of English literature, Rajanīkānta may be called the founder of the Assamese novel in general and historical novel in particular. His other contributions to Assamese literature were these elements of broad sympathy and the most kind'y humour, milder than even that of Chaucer of English literature. True it is that novels had been written before and after him in Assamese, but it is Rajanīkānta who at once appears before one's mind's eye when we speak of Assamese novels as a type of literature of the Assamese.

As usual, Rajanīkānta's merits as an artist were not unmixed, and he of course had his share of shortcomings. We have referred to his old-fashioned or grandfatherly ways of narrating stories, a method itself foreign to the novel. Every now and then he uses the vocative case "O reader, do you recognise" etc. which is tiresome more often than not. He would even stop in the midst of an interesting conversation of his

His defects as an artist.

heroes or heroines to introduce the reader to a different subject thus rendering the description unnatural and giving a check to the flow of the events. He also sometimes indulges in too much of didacticism, as in his novel *Nirmal Bhakat* again in the grandfatherly way of giving morals of what he could say to children. His command over the language does not always seem perfect and he does not seem to have had that excellence of style that could be expected of such a master artist. The painter's brush in his hand appears in general to have after all been short of what may really be called fine. Original as he had been in his creation of Dālimi of his novel *Miri-Jiyari*, he was practically robbed of all its glory by the character of Dālimi of the drama *Jaymati Kunwari*, by Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā, and was thus beaten in his own field for being unable to show a finished product of art in his magnificient creations of the character. His novels often lack in problems of life and in any attempt to present or study them. But despite these apparent shortcomings Rajanīkānta was a great writer and his novels like *Manomati* have been dramatised and have been presented to the silver screen.

Durgāprasād Majindār Baruwā (1870-1928) was a resident of Śukān Pukhurī the environs of the Śibsāgar town. He was a poet of the line of Baladeva Mahanta writing poems for children in particular in a simple and easy style, but having a poetic diction of no mean order. His *Uju Kavitā* (1896) and *Larā-Kavitā* (1899) and *Ful* (1899) are such poetical works. His mythological dramas *Briṣcketu* and *Guru Dakṣiṇā* and his comedies *Mahari* and *Negro*, and the latter in particular deserve special mention. *Mahari* paints a portrait true to life of half-educated Assamese youths going from door to door of European tea-garden managers for apprenticeship as tea-garden 'Babu', the former playing a havoc on English language and the latter on

Durgā Prasād Majindār Baruwā (1870-1928) and his works.

Assamese. This is an aspect of Assamese social life of which no second picture has been painted and of which perhaps no better portrait can be drawn. This is one of the few such social dramas that have not been out of use in the footlight these fifty years.

Mafijuddin Āhmed Hāzarikā (born 1870) is a resident of the Dibrugarh town and is a retired clerk of the subdivisional court. He is said to be the descendant of one Bāgh Hazarika who had been a warrior that fought successfully the Muhammadans of Bengal in the battle of Śarāighāt. His only contribution to literature is the *Jnan Mālinī*, a poetical work of simple and chaste Assamese style for children and youths in the main, published in 1897. Such poems as 'Din-Kaṇā' and 'Mariśālikhani' have a poetic excellence of no mean order. He enjoys the second literary pension from the Government of Assam at the rate of Rs. 30/- per mensem.

Mafijuddin Ahmed (b. 1870) and his *Jnān Mālini* (1897).

Pānindranāth Gagai (?1870—? 1910) was born in Cetiyā Gāon in the environs of the North Lakhimpur town and admitted into the local Lower Primary School about November, 1879, whence he was promoted to the Middle Vernacular standard. Pānindranāth then passed the Gauhati Normal school and was then appointed a teacher, first in the Dhakuwākhanā and then in the Town Middle Vernacular school. He studied Assamese literature in the meantime, became a collaborator of *Sāhitya Saṅgrah* (1893) and issued his schoolbooks *Asamiyā Larār Bhugol* and *Larāśikṣā* in three parts, besides contributing a good number of articles in prose and verse to the local magazines. This patriotic youth, who had died an early death, had a command over Assamese, as expressed even through his Assamese primers, that will leave it traces long.

Pānindranāth Gagai (? 1870-1910).

Padmanāth Gohāin Baruwā (1871-1946), the first literary pensioner, was born on the 9th Agrahāyaṇ (in the last week of November), 1793 Śak, in the village of Na-Kāri in North Lakhimpur. His father, Ghiṇārām, came to settle here from Śimaluguri Gāon, in Jakāicuk, Jhānji, in the Sibsagar subdivision. He got himself admitted into the local Lower Primary school even on the same day with Pānindranāth, his friend and future collaborator. After passing the Middle Vernacular standard, he came to Sibsagar where he got himself admitted to the Government High School. For sometime he left the High School and got himself attached to the Survey School of Maṇḍals and Mauzādārs as a student, which was however temporary. He again came to the Sibsagar High School whence he passed the Entrance examination in 1890. Then he went to Calcutta to study the First Arts course which however he could not pass. He then studied Law and was not successful here either. And at last he was compelled to return home.

Padmanāth Gohāin Baruwā (1870-1946).

This was the time when the *Jonāki* was being published and the Assamese Language Improving Society was already established and began its activities, thus making Calcutta a good centre of radiation of energy of Assamese students. Coming at this moment of fermentation, Padmanāth was at once taken by the storm and he plunged into the activities headlong. He became for sometime the editor of *Bijuli* which was published first as a rival paper of *Jonāki* from Calcutta. In this paper he published his domestic novel *Bhānumatī* about 1890 and then issued his second work *Lāhari*, also a social novel. When he came home he wrote a series of schoolbooks named *Nītiśikṣā*, and *Bhūgol Darpaṇ* and *Asam Buranji* which fetched him sufficient income.

His early publications (1890-95) and *Bijuli*.

In the meantime Padmanāth was appointed a teacher in the Assam Subordinate Education Service, and was posted as Headmaster in the Kahimā Middle English School and then an Assistant Master in the Valley High Schools. He was married in the mean time and lost his first wife in 1899. He wrote a long poem on this event and by the name of his deceased wife called it *Lilā*. It was written in blank verse in imitation of the style of early Kāvyas like Ramākānta's *Abhimanyu Badh* and Bholānath's *Sītā Haraṇ*. But as *Līlā* was written a quarter of a century after Ramākānta, the language was certainly more flowing. We may quote here the first few lines of the invocation to his muse after Milton.

The *Rilā* and the incident of its composition (1899).

Nājāno pujār vidhi, vandanār riti,
Bīṇāpāṇi Bāgdevi! caraṇ tomār
Kirūpe pūjim hāi bandim kimate ;
Bajoāṅ ananta kāl sanjībani bīṅā,
Gahin jokāre tār kaṁpāi banani,
Sarāi katanā ful kavi-fulanit.
Sur bujā ādi guru svargī kavigaṇe
Sur-Sūtā bāci lai gānthile katanā
Sanjībanī mālā. Anupam śobhā tār
Jilike caupāśe āhā kāvya kānanat.
Si dīptir prabhāvat hai dīptimān
Ādya kavi save, guru pad anusari,
Racile katana āru dīptimayī mālā.
Mane bacā chande bāndhi. Hānhe mātṛ bhāṣā
Ulāhat āji, pindhi putre racā hār......
Nubujoṅ bīnār sur mūrukh santāne,
Nakaṁpe fular thāri nasare epāhi,
Bāṅji ful abhāgār kalpanā-cakut.
Tathāpi hṛday-tantrī bāji uṭhe ghane
Marmāhat cepā khāi priyā-birahat.

In 1900 Padmanāth issued his book of small poems and named it *Juraṇi* (Cooling); and then issued *Lilā* sometime after. He had a happy knack for poetry and prose

alike, and though he had not the classical style of Candra-kumār and Lakṣmīnāth, his immediate predecessors, he had a diction in Assamese that may be called his own. We quote the following beautiful poem *Oraṇī* (The Veil of a Woman).

Mari yadi jion punu, jīwan salanikai:
Mari mari janma dharoṅ, ramaṇī oraṇī hai:
Āvegar cheg dhari, dharoṅte priyāk lāje:
Baṅcām mukhani dhāki, awalā sārathi sāje.
Āhile basanta-rāj, malayāt uti-buri:
Bijulī bayānkhani, dekhuām uri uri.
Cakuwe cakuwe duyo caku-kathā pātoṅtei:
Bicced dhemāli cām dhāki dhari lācatei.
Chewe chewe theo dhari, miciki hāṅhiṭi cām :
Igāle pohar di, āvegat cumā khām.
Dherekani dhumuhāi, akasmāte gāji uthi.
Bicchedar bibhīṣika, yadi he dekhāi mathi ;
Anyāyak āṅr kari, priyāk bujani dim:
Bimariṣ cakupān, cipe cipe tuki pim.
Āman-jimankai, thākonte nīrale bahi :
Āmolani śobhā cām, khopāt lācate khahi.
Saundarjyar rūp-ras, biringile kapālat :
Kapālate maci tham, ulāhere tilakat.
Eteke bāsanā mor, pūrṇa hay yāte ai :
Mari janma labhoṅ yen, ramaṇī oraṇī hai.

That is—' When I am born again let me be born reapeatedly as the veil on the head of a woman. When my beloved will be overpowered with shyness shall I save by covering her face. When the gentle breeze of Spring comes, shall I reveal her face, bright as the lightning, by dancing in it. While we are speaking with eyes, shall I see the fun of separation by hiding her face. Shall I see her gentle smile by moving poetically to and fro; and shall kiss, out of emotion, her one cheek by allowing light on the other. If there be storms and thunderbolts, threatening separation, shall I remove all her fears and console her, and shall drink her tears of sorrow in rhythmic movement. When

she sits sorrowfully, I shall enjoy that peerless beauty by shrinking on her lock of hair. When her beauty appears in the form of perspiration, I shall take it as an ointment. May God fulfil my desire so that I be reborn at the veil on the head of a woman.'

Padmanāth Gohāin Baruwā's talent in drama and other spheres.

Late in his life he also published a voluminous work, *Kṛṣṇa Carit*, in prose, showing his leaning towards serious literature and earlier he issued a synopsis of the *Gīta*, as *Gitā Sār*. His dramas on historical and such topics are *Gadādhar*, *Jaymati*, *Sādhan* and *Lacit Phukan*, and his comedies or farcical works are *Teton Tamuli*, *Gāonburhā* and *Bhut ne Bhram*. Thus Padmanāth may be called a man of versatile talents in novel, drama, poetry and other writings. Besides this, politics was also his favourite game, and he first appeared rather as a public man with such organisations as the Āhom Association, Assam Association, etc. Thus Rāi Bāhādur Padmanāth Gohāin Baruwā leaves many claims both as a man of letters and as a man of local politics to live in the memory of posterity. If the intrinsic merit of his works is not quite considerable he must be remembered for his variety and his leading works as in novels.

Benudhar Rajkhowā.

The next prominent figure in the field of modern Assamese literature is Rāi Sāhib Benudhar Rājkhowā. He was born on the 11th December, 1872 at Khowāng, on the bank of the Dihing river, a few miles off the Dibrugarh town, as the youngest son of Sucāndrām Rājkhowā, the influential Mauzadar of the locality. Benudhar got himself admitted to the Dibrugarh Government High School after passing the Jaypur Middle English School, and got through the Entrance examination in 1889 from the former. He then got himself admitted to the First Arts course of the Presidency College, Calcutta, but passed the Course from

Ripon College of the same city in 1892. Then he took his B. A. degree from the same college in 1896, and joined the M. A. and B. L. classes in Calcutta. Meanwhile, in 1899, he was offered the post of a Sub-Deputy Collector which he joined and left his studies. From this post he was soon recruited to the Assam Civil Service whence he retired in 1931 as an officiating Deputy Commissioner of the Sibsagar district.

Benudhar already well-known as an author and prolific writer even as a student in the nineties of the last century.

Early even in his school career Benudhar had strong leanings towards Assamese literature and devoted himself to it whole-heartedly since he came to Calcutta in 1889, becoming the editor of the Assamese magazine *Bijuli*, first published in 1890, in its third year. Even as a student he became the author of *Nīti-pāth* (Moral Lessons) in 1889, of *Sāhitya Prabeś* (Entrace to Literature) and *Pañca Kavitā* (Five Poems) in 1895, and of *Larā Puthi* (Children's Primers) about this time. He also published his *Daś-Gīt* (Ten songs) in 1899, being one of the pioneers of modern Assamese songs and edited the *Ādi Kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇ*, published by Ganeśrām Āgarwālā this very year. His *Saru Larār Gāṇ* (Songs of little children), another collection of modern Assamese songs, was issued about this time as also his *Candra-Sambhaw Kāvya*, the latter being another pioneer work in the field of modern Assamese Kāvya. Benudhar's *Seutī-Kirāṇ* is a leading modern drama presenting a picture of modern Assamese society, and was issued as early as 1894, with fine character-sketching. As early as 1889 Benudhar also published some stray-scenes of Assamese society, in collaboration with Padmanāth Baruwā, and named it *Dekā-Gābharu* (Young man and woman). It was probably a failure and invited hostile criticisms from such writers as Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā, and it transpires that this difference of opinion was res-

ponsible for the appearance of the second Calcutta Assamese students' magazine *Bijuli*, while the first, *Jonākī*, hardly completed its first round. Any way, Benudhar was already known as an author and a prolific writer even as a student in the nineties of the last century.

Nor did Benudhar allow himself ease and comfort, away from literary pursuits, when he entered service, life and the world. Far from it. In the small hours of the morning of the present century, he used to issue books with unceasing zeal. In 1901 he published his songs *Asamiyā Bhāi*; in 1903, his mythological drama *Duryodhanar Urubhanga*; in 1906, his poems *Bānhī* (The Flute), and in 1908, another mythological drama, *Dakṣa-Jajña*, appeared. One important work of this period in prose is his *Lakhimi Tirotā* (The Auspicious wife) in which in the novel form of a dialogue he tries to depict an ideal Assamese wife. His *Bihu*, a prose work on the theory and practice of this great Assamese festival, is another useful work of this first decade of the present century. In the second and third decades he mainly issued many dramas social and farcical, but all educative; and some small poetical works relating this life and beyond. *Darbār* is a play consisting of a few scenes depicting the mirths and frivolties of the Darbar of king George V celebrated in India in 1912, and was issued accordingly. *Kali Yuga* (The Iron Age) is another play, written in imitation of Hem Candra Baruwā's *Kaniyār Kīrtton* as a satire on Assamese society, in collaboration with Durgāprasād Majindār Baruwā. Similar other plays of this period are *Kuri Śatikār Sabhyatā* (Civilization of the Twentieth Century) *Tini Ghaiṇī* (Three Wives), *Aśikṣitā Ghaiṇī* (The uneducated wife), *Corar-Sṛṣṭi* (The Thief's Invention), *Yampurī* (The Abode of the God of Death) and so forth, each depicting one side or the other of Assamese

Benudhar's contribution in the first, second and third decades of the present century.

social life. His latest poetical works include *Dehar Pralay* (Deluge of the Body), *Jiwan Sandhijā* (The Evening of Life), *Sipurir Batari* (The Message of the other world), *Punaruththān* (Resurrection) and so forth. His *Mahāsati Jaymati* depicts a life-like picture of the sufferings to which Jaymati was subjected, in songs composed after indigenous ballads.

Benudhar's monumental works—his *Dictionary of Assamese Phrases and Idioms* and his *Notes on the Sylheti Dialect etc.*

Benudhar's monumental work in Assamese language is probably not his *Candra-Sambhaw Kāvya* nor his *Sutī-Kiraṇ Nāṭak*, but his *Asamiyā Khanda Bākya Koś* or the Dictionary of Assamese Phrases and Idioms, explained in Assamese and English. It is a pioneer work and has no second as yet. Besides this he has written a large number of books in English to acquaint the non-Assamese readers with the glories of Assam. Such works are his *Brochure on the Assamese Language* issued as early as the 14th October, 1898, from 24, Ramakanta Mistry's Lane, Calcutta ; his *Assamese Demonology* published in 1905 with an Introduction by Mr. W. J. Reid, I. C. S.; his "original and interesting book" as Colonel P. R. T. Gordon, M. A., I. C. S., styles it, namely his *Notes on the Sylheti Dialect*, which he wrote as a member of the Assam Civil Service while working at Maulavi Bazar, Sylhet, and published in 1913, and from which we have quoted enough elsewhere to show that the Sylheti dialect is more akin to Assamese than to Bengali ; his *Short Accounts of Assam*, published in 1915; *Historical Sketches of Assam* issued in 1917; his English rendering of Śankardeva's *Vipra Dāmodar* published in 1918; and his translation of Mādhavadeva's *Holi Nām-Ghoṣā*, in 1919 ; *Some Popular Superstitions of Assam* issued in 1920, and his English rendering of the Vaiṣṇavite poet Sridhar Kandali's illustrious poem *Kāṇkhowā* (Ear-Eater) in the same year; and his English rendering of Śankardeva's famous work *Guṇmālā* in 1923, deserve special mention.

Benudhar's contribution to Assamese literature and culture is manifold. Since his student life his earnest endeavours were to fill in any gap of Assamese language and literature he saw, to start new lines of action and to give the glories of Assamese national life and literature a wide publicity. Besides his *Dictionary of Assamese Pharases and Idioms*, and in his *Notes on the Sylheti Dialect* so invaluable to Assamese philological researches, he displays enough originality in his songs and poems, in his *Candra-Sambhaw Kavyā*, in his social drama *Seuti-Kiran*, and in his social satirical plays, and in the novel plan of his *Lakhimi Tirota* (The Auspicious Wife). As a writer he is almost as voluminous as Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruwā even if he is not as popular. Benudhar's defect, if any, seems to be that in his zeal to be strictly national and original, he often lives more in Assam of by-gone days than in the living present both in regard to his matter and his language and style. His earlier works have been out of print and the present generation has little chance to become acquainted with his writings. Any way, Benudhar's claim to live long in the memory of posterity cannot be called in question.

His merits and defects.

Rajanīkumār Padmapati 1866-1948 is another Assamese research scholar of considerable originality who presented the results of his researches mainly in English. The earliest of his research work was presented to the readers of the monthly magazine *Bānhi* for 1910-11, and was later reproduced in the form of a book entitled *Purani Asamat Bhuwuki* (Glimpse of Ancient Assam). Rajanīkānta is the first and foremost research scholar who made any systematic effort to trace the history of the Kālidās of Assam and to study the Epics and Purānas to find out new information in regard to the antiquities of the ancient kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa or Kāmarūpa. He also

Rajanīkumār Padmapati and his resarch works.

had some interest in Botany and made some researches in that line. His works in English that were highly appreciated by Calcutta newspapers include—*Origin of the Animal World* (1915); *A Treatise ascertaining the correct sites of places, rivers and mountains of India as found in the Rāmāyaṇa* (1925); *A Strange Mistake of the Geographers* (1926); *Christ as Krishna* (1937). We do not vouchsafe that all the bold conclusions of Rajani Kumār are truths beyond doubt, nor do we approve of his method of research as quite modern or scientific. But we find that he opens our eyes into new vistas of unexplored grounds which have later on been explored by subsequent scholars with much advantage.

Ānanda Candra Āgarwālā.

Ānanda Candra Āgarwālā Rāi Bāhādur (1874-1939) is just the next man who in his later life felt deeply interested in the researches in regard to the antiqities of Assam, and studied the Epics and the Purāṇas for the purpose. But it is in poetry that he was interested earlier and we may almost assert that it is for his poetry that Ānanda Candra will be remembered long after men manage to forget his research works. He belonged to the same family of Assamese Āgarwālās as Haribilās and his son, Candrakumār, the poet. Ānanda Candra was born at Kalangpur in the Tezpur subdivision in 1874, to his father Kāśirām and his mother Rādhikā. He was educated in the Tezpur Government High School whence he passed his Entrance Examination in 1891, and got himself admitted to the First Arts course in the Metropolitan (now Vidyasagar) College, Calcutta, securing a scholarship of the monthly value of Rs. 20/-. Ānanda Candra also was highly interested in literature from his schoolboy days, and in Calcutta he just launched into the Assamese students' activities in the Assamese Language Improving Society and the Assamese magazines, *Jonāki* and *Bijuli* with the result that like some of his senior

Assamese friends he had to return home without any University degree whatsoever. For sometime he served as a teacher in the Sibsagar Bezbaruwā High School, and then entered the Police Department as a subordinate officer and retired in the early thirties of this century as a senior Police Superintendent of the Imperial Police Service.

Ānanda Candra the poet and the Prince of Translators.

Ānanda Candra rendered the famous poem "Psalm of Life" of the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow into Assamese verse before he passed his Entrance Examination. This poem, "Jiwan Sangit," may be called his masterpiece and is not only better than the Bengali rendering but even seems in parts better than the original. His knack of translating famous English poems into Assamese has almost become proverbial whence he has been styled the Assamese Prince of Translators. His famous translations include those of the poems "Better Land" by Mrs. Hemans, "Edwin and Angelina" by Oliver Goldsmith in his *Vicar of Wakefield*, and so forth. Compared with his translations his original poems are really few, unless we call many of his translated poems original. Ānanda Candra was a regular contributor to the monthly magazines *Jonāki*, *Bānhi* and many others. Even as a student Ānanda Candra collaborated with Brahmānanda Barkākati, Nabincandra Bardalai and Kṛṣṇa Prasād Āgarwālā and published a collection of their songs numbering 141, and styled it *Dharma Sangit*. He and Kṛṣṇa Prasād were best guides to Karuṇābhirām Baruwā, son of Guṇābhirām, when the latter edited and published his *Larā-Bandhu* (Children's Companion), the first Assamese monthly magazine for Assamese children, started in 1888. But Ānanda Candra's literary out-put was very small as an author despite his life-long literary activities. His publications include his Assamese primers *Ādi Pāṭh* and *Komal Pāṭh*, and a small collection of his poems, mainly verse-

renderings of familiar English poems, *Jilikani* (Radiance). He kept a fine collection of his best poems *Padumani* (The Lotus Lake) ready for print, but unfortunately it never came out. He died without leaving any issue and his wife Pārijāt Āgarwālā soon followed him. In spite of his Police uniform, he was a noble soul of proverbially amiable nature and deep-seated love of Assamese language, literature and people.

Candradhar Baruwā (b. 1874).

Candradhar Baruwā was born at Jorhat, sometime about September 1874. He passed his entrance Examination in 1892, and got through the First Arts course two years later from the Metropolitan College, Calcutta. He then got himself attached to the B. A. class in the St. Xavier's College of the city but failed to secure the degree, and returned home as an under-graduate in 1896. In 1900 he passed the pleadership examination and joined the Bar. After ten years' practice he gave up the Bar and took to tea-cultivation where he eventually thrived. He acquired a literary taste even as a student, and in 1904 appeared as the author of *Meghnād Badh*, a drama or dramatic presentation of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Meghnād Badh Kāvya*, written in a form of blank verse used by such Bengali dramatists as Girīś Candra Ghose. In 1915 he published his serio-comic play, *Bhāgya Parīkṣā*, admittedly a borrowed plot but adapted to suit Assamese society. Later he published his second drama *Tilottamā sambhav* written under the inspiration of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Tilottama Sambhav Kāvya*; and a collection of his satiric and other poems, *Ranjan*, in the twenties of the present century. There may be little to show that Candradhar had any gift of originality, but there can be no denying the fact that he shows a happy talent in poetical expressions in Assamese with considerable command over poetic diction and style that makes him popular to his readers. A few

of his satiric poems as "Kāvya Viśāradoham" (I am a past master in the poetic art), "Āmi Bhakat" (We are devotees) etc. combine the poet with the reformer, with a refined taste. These and some other poems of Candradhar may easily survive his dramatic writings.

Hiteśwar Barbaruwā (1877-1938). Hiteśwar Barbaruwā (1877-1938) was born to Cikau Gagai Barbaruwā at Saru Carāi, Jorhāt, about December 1877. Though belonging to the illustrious family of Bhadari Barbaruwā, formerly a minister to the Ahom King, Hiteśwar was born in straitened family circumstances and as such had to leave his studies from the top class of the Jorhat Government High School in quest of a job, and was at last appointed a tea-garden clerk. Hiteśwar's poetic gifts were overpowering, and neither his pecuniary circumstances nor his uncongenial tea-garden service could stand in the way of their development. He apparently read very extensively in English literature and had a clear knowledge of the early history of Assam. He was an authority on the history of Ahom rule in Assam and has left a voluminous and monumental work on the subject in manuscript.

To use both his poetical gift and wide knowledge of history, Hiteśwar chose to write a series of Kāvyas in Assamese blank verse just as Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Nabin Sen did in Bengali literature. In 1902 he appeared first with his *Dhopākali* (The Blossom), a collection of his early poems written about 1899. Then appeared his historical Kāvyas *Kamatāpur Dhvaṁsa Kāvya*, written in 1903—1912; *Birahinīr Bilāp Kāvya* written, in 1896—1915, and *Tirotār Ātmadān Jaymatī Kāvya*, written in 1902—1913; *Ābhās Kāvya* in 1914; *Juddha Kṣetrat Āhom Ramani Kāvya* in 1915; *Angilā* and *Desdemonā Kāvya* in 1917 etc. in quick succession. There also appeared his historical novel *Mālitā* in 1914, and also his books on sonnets, *Mālach* in 1918 and *Caku-Lo* (Tears) in 1922.

Besides his great historical work, *Āhomar Din*, already referred to, another poetical work by him, *Talsārā Fular Tini Āñjali*, written in 1899-1914, has been left in manuscript.

His position as an Assamese K vya writer.

Hiteśwar is really last but not least of the writers of modern Assamese Kāvyas. Ramākānta and Bholānath wrote their Kāvyas on the themes of the great Epics the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* respectively. Then came their successor Padmanāth about the quarter of a century later, who though named his work *Lālā Kāvya*, really wrote a lyric in blank verse. Last came Hiteśwar with a brighter horizon and issued his historical Kāvyas properly so called. Bholānāth's language and style are nick-named Anglo-Benglo-Assamese for the mixture of the English and Bengali words and grammar respectively with Assamese, and hence may be left out of account. Ramākānta's language and style were dignified Assamese, and naturally contained a little high percentage of Sanskrit words, while in Hiteśwar's Kāvyas the percentage of colloquial Assamese words is higher. It is complained in certain quarters that such a high percentage of colloquial Assamese words cannot be in keeping with the dignity and serenity so essential to a Kāvya. But this is not a unanimous verdict on the point. Another charge levelled against both Padmanāth and Hiteśwar is that their styles are verbose and they indulge much in the luxury of words, which seems not unjustified.

Besides a genuine poetic temperament with which he was certainly gifted, Hiteśwar had a poetic situation created by his very family misfortunes. He lost his second son in 1910, his wife in 1912 and his third son in 1921. These sad occurrences which deeply affected his poetic mind also coloured all his poetical works and he produced some "sweetest songs" in Assamese language that "tell

of saddest thought". Indeed some of his lyrics as "Prāṇar Jiten" (Jiten, dearer than life), an elegy on the death of his second son, are almost unparalleled in modern Assamese literature; but they are rather too long to be quoted here. But we may conclude by quoting one love sonnet of Hiteśwar to give an idea of his lyric genius. The sonnet is named "Kāṇar Thuriā" (The Ear Ornament):

Pūrva janamar jāno kata puṇya bale,
Thuriā janam pāli tai jagatat;
Śoṅote khāoṅte kimbā uṭhoṅte bāṅhote
Cumā diya preyasīr komal gālat.
Yi cumār heṅpāhat ātur premik,
Premar rājyar yito amulya ratan;
Jāk lai saṁsārar sakalo baliā,
Anāyāse tai kintu pāwa sei dhan.
Yi cumār māthoṅ eti pābar āśāt
Premike uchargā kare parāṇ nijar;
Sei cumā lākhe lākhe nite pāwa tai,
Nājāno ki puṇya tor āchil pūrvar.
Nahal āmār kiya thuriā janam.
Pālo hay nite kata madhur cumban.

That is, 'Oh, I know not for what immense virtues of past life hast thou been born in the world as an ear-ornament. For thou showerest kisses on the tender cheeks of the beloved what during her sleep or meals and what while she rises or sits. Kisses, the precious jewels in the empire of Love, after which lovers are so thirsty and others too are mad, are easily obtainable by thee. Oh, I know not what virtues didst thou acquire in your former life that thou securest kisses by lacs and lacs for only one of which lovers sacrifice their life. Oh, why were we not born as such an ear-ornament that we could enjoy so many ambrosial kisses from day to day'. The sonnet, though not technically complete in octave and sestete and in other strict Petrarchan forms, and only loosely imitates a Shakespearean form, breathes a freshness and romance quite its own.

Raghunāth Caudhari, familiar rather as a bird-poet, was born about January 1880, at Gauhati. He was disabled in his early childhood having his feet deformed by a fall and lost both his parents about this time. His education was also haphazard and he left school after studying in the minor classes of the local High School. But he was certainly gifted with poetic talents, and though he was thus denied the chance of enriching his mind with any study of English or Sanskrit literature he seems to have read the rising Bengali literature of the nineteenth century sufficiently to germinate his poetic talents and to catch a glimpse of the romantic revival of English poetry through Bengali. It was the first decade of the twentieth century and he tried his hand in Assamese poetry first in the pages of the second series of the famous Assamese journal *Jonāki*, now published from Gauhati. Thus it is that in most of his early poems we find enough traces of Bengali grammar and Bengali poetic diction. But he did not take a long time to overcome this and he soon acquired Assamese poetic diction of no mean order. *Sādārī* (The Dear One), first published before the second decade of this century, contained about 28 poems written up to that time and included at least half a dozen poems that showed his originality. "Goāñhe ebār mor priya bihangini" (Sing once more, O my favourite female bird) was the title and burden of a poem of this collection, first published in the second series of *Jonāki*, and perhaps the best poem of the book. It has a poetic flow and diction quite its own, though it still betrays his wide reading of Bengali literature in the grammatical constructions. Here and there we find glimpse of ideas borrowed from the famous English bird poems as Keats's "Ode to a Nightingle," Shelley's "To a Skylark", Wordsworth's "The Skylark" and "To the Cuckoo" and so forth. In another poemon

Raghunāth Caudhari, a poet of birds.

Keteki, the Assamese Nightingale, in the same metre, perhaps written following the comparative success of the above poem, he is far less successful.

For more than twelve years the poet appears to have brooded over these ideas, the fruit of which appeared in 1923 as a long poem named *Keteki*. Here he almost perfectly overcomes his earlier influence of Bengali poetry and seems quite at home. The poem contains four Taraṅgas or waves of thought, the second and third of which particularly are excellent descriptions of Spring season in Assam and its influence on Assamese minds, specially on the young folk. It was followed by his third poetical work *Kārabālā* or Muharram Kāvya written in blank verse, and issued soon after. The language and style of this book are highly Sanskritic and hence not as sweet as his *Keteki* or other good poems. About the thirties he published another long poem, *Dahikatarā*, which is also a little Sanskritic in language and style and hence is not enjoying the popularity of his *Keteki*. Raghunāth has written also some beautiful flower poems as *Bhetkali* (The Lily Blossom) and *Golāp* (The Rose), and is one of the few modern Assamese poets who appears to have loved Nature for her own sake. Of course, Ragunāth has no definite message or any poetic creed as that of Wordsworth, Shelley or Keats; but he rather compares with Cowper who takes shelter in Nature, as he must, being compelled by circumstances, mainly social. He is a confirmed bachelor, without any employment and practically depending on literary sympathies and on sale of his books prescribed as textbooks. He was the editor of a children's magazine *Mainā*, only a few issues of which appeared, and was the editor of a literary magazine *Surabhi*.

His other works.

Durgeśwar Śarmā Rāi Bāhādur is another poet who appeared in the first decade of the present century in

the pages of the second series of *Jonāki.* He was born in 1885 at Patiyā Gāon, four miles off from the Jorhat town, where he completed his primary education, before he came to study in the local High School whence he passed the Entrance examination in 1899. He passed his First Arts examination from Cochbehār in 1901 and graduated himself in 1903. He passed the B. L. examination from Calcutta in 1906 and became a practising lawyer. In 1911 he was recruited from the Bar to be a member of the Assam Civil Service whence he retired in the early forties serving in different capacities and high ranks in the line. Durgeśwar's first and perhaps the best contribution to literature was his *Añjali* (Offering), a collection of his early poems, which appeared in 1910, his second collection, *Nibedan* (Appeal), appearing towards the close of the second decade. He also issued a few mythological dramas *Pārtha Parājay*, and *Bālibadh*, and another, *Candrāwali*, all in blank verse. Even in his dramas Durgeśwar appears more as a poet than as a dramatist. He had a happy knack for fine poetic language.

Durgeśwar Sarmā and his works.

Dimbeśwar Neog first appears as an author in 1921 with the long elegiac poem *Mālikā* (The Little Garland). Then appeared his other collections of poems *Thupitarā* (A Cluster of Stars) in 1925, *Mālatī* in 1927, and *Indradhanu* (The Rainbow) in 1930. In 1923 he first issued his collection of songs *Sanfurā*, and in 1942 his verse rendering of Kālidāsa's great masterpiece, *Meghadūta*, in imitation of the original Mandākrāntā metre. In 1932 appeared his sonnets of different forms as *Mukutā* (The Pearl), and in 1933 his mythological drama, *Kāmrūp*, in blank verse. He issued his poems connected with Islamic literature *Svahide Kārbālā* (Kārbālā in Martyrdom) in 1941, and *Sri-Farhād* and *Sohrub-Rustum* in 1943 in imitation of Rubāyat forms and metre. His first prose

Dimbeśwar Neog.

publication is *Dipāvalī* (Rows of Light), a collection of his short stories, issued in 1931, followed by *Ādhunik Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranji* (History of Modern Assamese Literature) in 1937, *Bijñānar Ag Kathā* (A Foreword to Science) in 1938, *Asamiyā Sāhityar Jilingani* (Rays of Assamese Literature) in 1939, *Vaiṣṇav Dharmar Ati-guri* (Origin of Vaiṣṇavism) in 1940, *Asamiyā Sāhityar Buranjit Bhumuki* (A Peep into the History of Assamese Literature) in 1941, *Vaiṣṇav Dharmar Bhakti Tattva* in 1942, and *Vaiṣṇav Dharmar Krama Vistār* in 1943. He early collected and published *Ākul Pathik*, Assamese amorous folk songs in 1922; *Bhogjarā*, Assamese women's folk songs, nursery rhymes etc., in 1928; *Kāvya Pratibhā*, an anthology of modern Assamese poems, in 1935. He edited several magazines as *Janmabhumi*, *Milan*, *Jenti* and *Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā*.

Daiba Candra Talukdar.

Daiba Candra Talukdār, a joint editor of *Janmabhumi*, born at Gauhati, first issued his poems *Prem-Paṭ* (Love-Scene) in 1923. *Kunbimala* and his drama, *Asam Pratibhā*, in 1923. He is since the author of many novels such as *Dhunwali-Kunwali* and poems such as *Saundarajya* (Beauty) issued in 1930.

Jatindranāth Duwarā Ratna Kānta Bar-kākati.

Jatindranath Duwarā, born at Sibsagar, and Ratnakānta Barkākati, born at Nowgong, who contributed their poems to *Bānhi* and *Uṣā* early since the second decade of the present century, first appeared as regular authors in 1926 and 1933 respectively, the former with his verse rendering of the *Rubayats of Omar Khayyam* and the second with the collection of his poems, *Sewāli*. Jatindranath has since published his other works: *Kathā-Kavitā* (Prose-poem) and *Āpon Sur*, a collection of his poems in the thirties. Both of these writers show sufficient command over the poetic art, the former with a prominet note of love and pessimism, and the latter with an inspiration of Rabindra poetry and Rabindra philosophy.

Binanda Candra Baruwā, born at Teok, Jorhat, first appears with *Śankhadhvani*, a collection of his poems, in 1925, followed by its successor *Pratidhvani* (The Echo) in 1940. He has also published some story books as *Rājasthanar Sādhu* and *Nara-Nārāyaṇ*. Atul Candra Hāzarikā, a resident of Gauhati, who has now issued a good number of plays, first appears with his drama, *Narakāsur*, in 1930 and his collection of poems *Dipāli*, in 1940. Both of them are regular writers and have edited the magazine *Milan* in turn.

Binanda Candra Baruwā, Atul Candra Hāzarikā.

Besides these, we have a large number of casual old and young writers emerging late towards the close of the period under our review. Śaratcandra Goswāmī (1887-1946) excelled in short stories *Galpāñjali*, *Mainā* etc.; Devendranāth Bezbaruwā in history of literature; Devānanda Bharāli and Kālirām Medhi in history of language or philology; Dr. Bāṇī Kānta Kākati in criticism; Sonārām Caudhari; Sarbeśwar Kākati and Benudhar Śarmā in research; Haramohon Dās and Pratāp Candra Goswāmi in essay; Indreśwar Barṭhākur, Mitradev Mahanta, Nakul Candra, Bhugām Jyoti Prasad Āgarwālā and Kirttināth Bardalai in drama; Kumudeśwar Barṭhākur, Mahicandra Barā, Lakṣmīdhar Śarmā, and Halirām Dekā in novels and short story; Mahādev Śarmā in biography; and Nīlamaṇi Phukān, Lakṣmīnāth Phukān, Prasannalāl Caudhari, Devakānta Baruwā, Pārvati Prasad Baruwā, Ananda Candra Baruwa Kamaleswar Calihā and others in poetry.

Some minor authors.

We make a separate note of some authors or writers of this period, most of whom shone with their genius like meteors exhausting themselves even while shining. The great political leaders of Assam during the twenties and thirties, Nabin Candra Bardalai and Taruṇrām Phukan are responsible for some of their best poems and best songs

Some meteors of modern Assamese literature.

and well-executed essays and speeches, besides the former's published dramas and the latter's poems and essays on sexology. Candranāth Śarmā of Tezpur, Premadhar Calihā, Ganeś Candra Hāzarikā of Sibsagar, Jñānānanda Jagati *alias* Tulasi Prasād Datta of Dibrugarh are a few whose contribution to Assamese prose in particular must be long remembered. Memory of Gopāl Candra Bhuyān and Umeś Candra Baruwā of Nowgong, Padmanāth Śarma of Tezpur, Ganeś lāl Caudhari of Barpeta, Siṁhadatta Adhikāri of Gauhati; Thāneswar Hāzarikā of Sibsagar; Bhawanath Hāzarikā and Ganeś Candra Gagai of Jorhat, must be cherished at least for some flashes of their poetic talents.

Contribution of Mohammadan writers.

The contribution of Mohammadan writers to Assamese literature is now considerable. We have the jikirs of Azan Fakir *alias* Shah Milan in the post-Vaiṣṇavite period, the early comic play of Kefāyatullā and the pioneer poetical work of Mafijuddin Ahmad. Their number have since increased by leaps and bounds. Moslehuddin Ahmad of *Majār Galpa* fame and Pajiruddin Ahmad of *Gulenār* reputation residents of Nowgong and Jorhat respectively, are popular Assamese writers. Khān Bāhādur Fāizuddin Ahmad of Jorhat was the author of a biography of Muhammad and of a history of Kārbālā in martyrdom. Khān Bāhādur Ātāur Rahman has made scholarly translation and Muhammad Muhibullā a popular Assamese version of the holy Quorān. In 1919-20 an Assamese organ of Islamic culture, *Islami Akhbar* appeared from Gauhati, and another journal, *Pracārak*, edited by Muhammad Suleimān Khān made its appearance from Dibrugarh in 1928. Muhammad Sāleh ably edited the quarterly magazine, *Sādhanā*, mouth-piece of the Assam Muhammadan Students' Conference, for six or seven years since 1924, till it was discontinued. Sādir Hussain edited

another magazine, *Janani*, published from North Lakhimpur in 1926. Āzizur Rahmān Shāh is a textbook writer on Islamic subjects. Muhammad Suleiman Khan of *Kavitā-Puthi* fame is responsible for a good number of beautiful poems for children. Jili *alias* Genimat Ali contributed a good number of excellent poems to *Bānhi* in the second decade of this century and Herācetullā wrote many patriotic poems. Saifuddin Ahmad and Firdous Ali wrote some high class essays in local magazines, and Dr. Moyidle Islam Barā contributed some fine poems to local magazines. At present we have quite a fair band of young Muhammadan writers of prose and verse, including Mafizuddin Ahmad of Goālpār, Moslehuddin Hāzarikā and Raihen Shāh of Dibrugarh, and Ibrahim Ali of Mangaldai, Abdus Sattar and Abdul Mālik of Jorhat and so forth.

Contribution of women writers.

Contribution of women writers of this period is also remarkable. We have earlier mentioned the names of the celebrated women writers as Padmāwati Phukanani (1853-1928), daughter of Anandaram Phukan and the earliest Assamese novelist, and Viṣṇupriyā and Svarnalatā, respectively wife and daughter of Guṇābhirām Baruwā writers of *Nitikathā* and *Ārhi-Tirotā*. Other early women writers of the first and second decades of this century were Śarat Kumāri and Kunti Phukanani, and Hemprabha Das, the authoress of *Jñānmālā* and *Saj Kathā*. Jamuneśwari of *Aruṇā* fame, Dharmeśwari of *Fular Śarāi* and Nalinibālā of *Sandhiār Sur* fame are illustrious Assamese poetesses; Snehalatā of *Bīṇā* etc., and Candraprabhā of *Pitribhith* fame are familiar women novelists. Prajñā Sundarī and Dhanadā Kumārī have specialized in literature on cooking, and Bhubaneśwarī and Annadākumārī in women's marriage and religious folk songs. Kamalālayā and Kanaklatā are well-known as joint editors of *Ghar-Jenti*, the organ of the Assamese Women Society. Memory of Ratnakumārī,

Prafullabālā, and Nārāyaṇī must be long cherished as inaugurating the women movement even though they wrote little except a few addresses. Ājalitarā, the authoress of *Ālibābā, Sindbād,* and *Ālāddin* stories and of *Ānandarām Phukan* and *Guṇābhirām Baruwā* biographies, and Suprabhā, the authoress of *Aribaṇa*, collection of translated short stories, are some women writers of the younger generation making their appearance in the early thirties and forties respectively.

IV

SUMMARY AND PRESENT POSITION

Assam's reverses of fortune.

Modern Assamese literature is a new thing, practically cut off from its past; and a new literature is always a problem. Not only in literature but also in political and social aspects modern Assamese life is almost severed from its past in many important respects. Facts of Assam's reverses of fortune in the modern period are stranger than fiction. Not only has this land which we have traced to have enjoyed freedom under its own kings for at least two thousand years, lost its independence as in a dream, but this country which we have shown to have once comprised the whole of Eastern India as far as Tibet, has reduced till it has now been converted into an unhealthy corner of a black-hole. Its language too which we have traced to have existed independently at least since the reign of Narakāsur Varman kings for about one and a half thousand years and to have spread throughout the length and breadth of ancient Prāgjyotiṣa or Kāmarupa kingdom, met with such reverses that Bengali had for sometime usurped her place in her own hearth and home.

The germs of decay and senility were there in the social corruption and political downfall of this kingdom remaining with her head erect for at least these long two thousand years. Mental depression followed these misfortunes not hitherto experienced and an inferiority complex was its result. Emergence and rise of Bengal and her aggressive zeal and exuberance sometimes served as a menace to the natural living of Assam; for with a youthful buoyancy of spirit new Bengal wanted now to thrust on Assam, and though she earlier failed in physical power, she at last somehow got an opportunity in the early nineteenth century to thrust her language.

Emergence and rise of Bengal.

Bengali usurped the position of Assamese in her own home, whoever be guilty of it, in schools and courts, from 1836 to 1873 officially and practically it lingered till the beginning of the present century. But the mischief is not yet gone. The older generation taught in Bengali has left some marks of the speech in their vocabulary and grammar and, what is worse, an inferiority complex in Benglo-phobia, which still works in some minds. Thus Bengali not only retarded the progress of education and literature of Assam foı more than half a century, but it had other far-reaching evil effects which are not yet wholly removed. This is responsible for the animus still entertained in certain Assamese quarters against Bengali, for unfortunately many on the other side still seem to indirectly support, far from regretting, that mischievous and wrong act of Bengali usurpation, and appear to show a superiority complex in regard to Assamese, which no self-respecting people would tolerate. But this is an individual and not a Bengali-Assamese question: for we have already shown how great Bengalees represented by scholars as Ramesh Chandra Dutt and Sir Prafulla Chandra

Evil effects of Bengali usurpation not wholly gone.

Ray fully supported the legitimate claim of Assamese, and there must still be a large number in Bengal who "have a great regard for Assamese language and literature" and who "sincerely wish that both should flourish side by side with other great languages and literatures of India."

Lack of a definite tendency in present-day Assamese literature.

As we have just observed, modern Assamese literature is almost quite a new thing detached from its earlier connexions such as the Vaiṣṇavite literature, though a section still clings to it. Foundation of modern Assamese literature was laid practically by the American Baptist Missionaries supported by Ānandarām, Guṇābhirām, and Hemcandra, all practically belonging to the modern school represented by *Orunodoi*. Next came Ramākānta, Bholānāth, Candrakumār, Lakṣmīnāth, Hemcandra, Rajanī Kānta, Benudhar, Padmanāth, Ānanda Candra and others, more or less initiated in the second school of Romanticism represented by the *Jonāki*. The writers of this school continue in fact till this day and the high-priests of this movement being deceased just before the forties and only one or two fortunately still surviving. To leave them alone, we hardly come across another school of new writers or really any thing worth while to call present-day tendencies in Assamese literature save what is called the Freudianism or 'realism' in some young writers' short stories and poems. This is perhaps little more than an echo of the present-day Bengali literature and an effervescence of youthful energy. Such painting of the seamy side of life appears earlier in such novels as the *Sādhanā* issued about 1926, and the question was raised even then if they were true pictures of Assamese society in general and not borrowed from other literatures. The theory is so generally put forward that 'detective novels' as those in Bengali may serve as a panacea for popularising Assamese literature and for creating a reading public and this so-called realism may be regarded as a plea

for securing a good sale of books and gaining a wider reading public even if they be of lower mental equipments.

Dissipation of the present-day Assamese poets.

There is actually nothing here like the revolutionary ideas or worship of Power rather than of Beauty, or the challenging attitude of the older values in art and life, which mark the present-day tendencies in English literature. In poetry there is hardly any poet who strikes any prominent note different from his immediate predecessors, the poets of the *Jonāki* school, or hardly anyone with something like a message even as we find in Candra Kumār's poetry. Raghunāth and Durgeśwar who started writing their poems in the first decade of the present century in the second series of the *Jonāki*, show fair command over the poetic style and display glimpse of love of Nature, her birds and flowers, in imitation of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, the high-priests of English Romanticism, but appear to lack anything which might be called their own. Jatindranāth, Śailadhar, Sūryakumār and Ratnakānta who penned their poems early in the second decade, the first with excellent melodies of verse and the last with his Rabindra cult of poetry, seem now all but spent up. Dimbeśwar and Binanda Candra started issuing their poems since the early twenties, but they now often appear to have been led by pursuits of literature other than poetry. Devakānta and others who have embarked on a poetic enterprise since the thirties, seem to have mainly followed the Freudian theory which seems to lead to nothing. Ambika Caraṇ who first emerged also in the second decade, is the only poet who infuses sufficient vigour and dash into whatever he writes: but unfortunately he writes little and is by now mainly occupied with local politics. Nilamaṇi has of late taken to poetry after he had been on the wrong side of fifty with success of the average.

Present day Assamese fiction, drama, music, essay, criticism, journalism etc. generally wanting in serious attention.

About present-day Assamese fiction too we have the same story to repeat. While Rajanikānta still stands, and is likely to stand in near future unapproached by any one, Daiba Candra, Snehalatā and a few such writers are keeping up the tradition of Assamese novels. In present-day drama, the earlier tradition left by Lakṣmīnāth, Padmanāth, Benudhar and Candradhar have been followed by a band of young writers as Mitradev, Nakulcandra, Atulcandra and others, none yet appearing as of outstanding merit, and all lacking either in quantity or in quality. In both the science and art of music Padmadhar, Jyoti Prasād and Kīrtināth are making some efforts after Lakṣmīrām, but none appears to have chalked out a definite line for modern Assamese music. About essay, criticism and journalism too it may be said that few writers are persistent in them. Lambodar and Satyanāth our immediate predecessors have left a fair tradition, but they have been seriously taken up by few present-day writers save such ones as Jñānanāth. Lakṣmīnāth is also the pioneer of Assamese criticism and only a few writers like Bāṇīkānta are following it, and even then there seems to be more stress in general on pedantry and intellectual gymnastics of readings in English criticism than a sincere appreciation of intrinsic literary beauties and merits. Assamese journalism in the present-day is apparently making much headway, but it is to be seriously doubted how much it produces of good journalism which, according to Mr. Bernard Shaw, is more important than good literature; for there are really few persons who have taken to journalism for a real love of it or even as a profession, and not as a mere means of keeping the body and soul together. Journalism in such hands can therefore be hardly expected to produce its wished for object.

The future of Assamese literature is an unborn child. Hence nothing can be predicted or forecast with certainty. But undoubtedly the child is in the womb of today and all that has been going on at the present moment will shape and mould it. So it may not be out of place or impertinent to make a few general observations on the present position of Assamese literature. I may reiterate here what I have already said in surveying Assamese poetry of the modern period (Preface to *Kāvya Pratibhā*, an Anthology of Modern Assamese Poetry; October, 1934):

The future of Assamese literature.

"It is a period of peculiar interest and one which experienced a great influx of Western ideas and thoughts in all aspects of social life. In literature, it was an epoch of awakening and creation. Especially in poetry, we come across new forms and ideas growing hand in hand with, and sometimes replacing, old ones. Thus about the last two decades of the nineteenth century, we find blank verse and sonnets and other lyrics gradually growing in the literature, to say nothing in this connexion about the rise and development of novels and other new forms of modern prose. In matter too, as in manner, poetry of the period is vastly varied, even the printing press not escaping a poetical treatment.

"In closing this brief survey, the Editor, however, feels inclined to note that if the century under review has seen no Phoebus arise in the literary horizon of Assam, it has no doubt witnessed such bodies in the heavens as may well announce the advent of one in no remote future. Poems have been produced during the period, more especially in its middle part, that may bear comparison with the best poems of other literatures of the world. But thus far, and within reasonable bounds, we can flatter ourselves no farther. The Editor notices and records with regret that the period towards the last, shows a decline and ebb, rather than a rise, in its creative fertility. One might perhaps claim with truth that the last decade or two may show rather an increase in the percentage of writers and writings, a large swelling in the number of periodicals, and almost a breathless rush to the printing press; but a careful scrutiny may reveal in no time that the literature in general, and poetry in particular, is mostly ephemeral, badly lacking in sub-

stance; and an uncritical imitative tendency is not wanting in some cases. It is perhaps due to literature being usually regarded as a thing of luxury and pleasure rather than one of study and cultivation, and also as an 'unprofitable' business yielding neither butter nor bread, nor capable of keeping one's body and soul together, hence regarded as a mere hobby of school and college life. Poetry especially, is a jealous mistress indeed, who demands whole-hearted attention and regard from her admirers. But how much do we lack in real devotion and devotees! Of course, in Assam it is not to be expected that there will grow a very vast literature as in some big world languages; but one can reasonably hope to see the gradual development of a sound and beautiful modern literature in a language which has a glorious past of its own. What, then, are the factors that are in the way of its natural development? "Chill Penury" freezing "the genial current of the soul" is no doubt the first and foremost cause. What, then, are the others? Are they cheap reputations and not rare showers of mutual admiration in the newspapers and periodicals, the stagnant character of the literature having very few outlets to world's literature, lack of real acquaintance with foreign and even with this literature itself? I leave these questions to all those who are concerned."